

AMBASSADOR CHARLES H. TWINING

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Today is the 26th of May 2004. This is an interview with Charles H. Twining. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. I'm Charles Stewart Kennedy. Do you go by Charles or Charlie?

TWINING: Charlie.

Q: Let's start at the beginning. Could you tell me when and where you were born, and a little about your family?

TWINING: Sure. I'm a farm boy from Maryland. My dad, grandfather, and his father, had worked a farm that my great grandfather bought with money that he made in the California gold rush. It's in northern Maryland. I was born and raised on the farm and participated in activities like 4-H and the like. I found early on an interest in things foreign; starting with a postcard a passenger on a Trans-Atlantic cruise sent me just after World War II. I was intrigued.

Q: When were you born?

TWINING: I was born in 1940.

Q: The Twinings came from where, originally, do you know?

TWINING: They came from England. I think it was, perhaps the ship after the Mayflower. They wanted to see how the Mayflower did.

Q: How about on your mother's side?

TWINING: My father's family were basically dirt farmers, and my mother's family were educators and farmers. They were a mixture, probably, with as much English blood as anything else.

Q: Did your father get a higher education?

TWINING: My father went to the tenth grade. He was needed on the farm. Starting from the age of five, he had to do farm chores every morning before school. My mother was the educated one.

Q: Where did she go to school?

TWINING: After high school, she went to the Maryland Institute of Fine and Practical Art and studied fine arts.

Q: Was your mother from Maryland, too?

TWINING: Yes sir, both sides of the family are from Maryland, Baltimore County.

Q: Do you have brothers/sisters?

TWINING: One brother, younger, who grew up and made a career of the military.

Q: What kind of farm were you raised on?

TWINING: Located in a little place called Glen Arm, Maryland, it was a mixed, general farm. We had about 60 cows, 5,000 chickens. We sold eggs. We did a lot of vegetable growing, everything from corn and tomatoes to rutabagas. It was a very general kind of farm. Family farms, in the past, on the east coast, didn't have to be large. You had large families to provide the labor. It worked until my generation.

Q: I assume you were intimately involved with the cows, the chickens, and the rutabagas. How did farming suit you?



TWINING: There were a couple of things I liked. I had heifers as my 4-H project. I had normal chores. When I came home from school, I would have to take care of the chickens, feed them and gather the eggs. Those things were okay, but my epiphany came when I was about 12 years old. My father gave me a hoe and I was to hoe the tomato field. This was a field of about five acres. The temperature was something between 90 and 100 degrees. I said to myself, as I had been out in the field for about three hours, "I'm not going to do this all my life." It helped orient me a bit. Here I am, over 50 years later, now ready to settle back on the old farm.

Q: Is the farm still going to be five acres of tomatoes?

TWINING: No, not quite. When my father and two brothers passed away, the farm was subdivided. The brothers and my dad all had children, so then it was further subdivided. What I have is a great big barn, and sheds, and property where the farmhouse was, and some acreage of land. But, the farm still looks the same, with the back of the farm converted into a state park. Relatives and others are working the land.

Q: How about schooling? Let's start with elementary school. What sort of school did you go to?

TWINING: My father was in the first class of a four-room rural school, which 35 years later, I attended as well. It was four classrooms for six years. It was nice. Pupils were farm children, basically.

Q: In elementary school, were there any particular courses that you loved?

TWINING: Yes, anything involving social studies, geography, and history. Those were the things I really enjoyed.

Q: How many students were there in this four-room schoolhouse?

TWINING: Oh, there were maybe 120 students, with two grades often in one room.

Q: I had some of this too. It sounds like a situation where you wondered how kids could learn, but often kids are picking up things, and are often a grade ahead of themselves. You're getting educated twice over.

TWINING: I agree. I think you benefited in many cases.



Q: What about reading? Were you reading as a kid?

TWINING: Sure, always. That was coming from my mother and my mother's family, who were educators basically. Books were a very important part of their lives. My mother's sisters always made sure I had lots of books to read.

Q: Well, you were an easy kid to get presents for.

TWINING: That's true.

Q: I was the same. Where did you go to high school?

TWINING: That was the change in my life. I went to a small junior high. Then, suddenly, a new high school was built in the suburbs of Baltimore. I went from being a country boy to a city kid. All the country kids sort of hung out together. The barriers started to break down, and the city kids would ask about how chickens really mated, and so forth. It was good for my educational process.

Q: In high school, were there any particular courses you liked?

TWINING: I was fascinated, once again, by history. I loved French and had a wonderful French teacher. I will never forget a particularly wonderful English teacher who disregarded the curriculum that the county wanted her to teach. She had saved books from 40 years earlier that had been discontinued. She had us work on those books because she felt they were better. Those are the teachers who stand out.

Q: What was the name of the high school?

TWINING: Parkville High School, in the suburbs of Baltimore City.

Q: By this point, was Maryland segregated?

TWINING: It was segregated. It was an awkward situation. I remember as a boy asking my father why the African-American boy nearby didn't go to the same school I did, instead of going across the county to another school. It took a while for things to sink in. But, obviously Brown v. The Board of Education decision in 1954 changed everything, for the better.



Q: Were you in high school at this point?

TWINING: I was in high school at that point.

Q: How did it affect your high school?

TWINING: Well, it's interesting. The high school, even though it was brand new, became immediately overcrowded. For some reason, the county said that it would wait to desegregate that high school, bringing new students in only when another high school was built and the student body could be divided more easily. My school in Baltimore County was the last school to be integrated, which was sort of curious.

Q: Did you get involved in extra curricular activities, or did you have to head home to the farm?

TWINING: One always gets involved in extra curricular activities, and I participated on the student council and was always a member of choral groups and barbershop quartets, things of this type. However, being out on a farm, being outside a transportation network, except when the school bus operated, meant that I wasn't able to stay after school. I wanted to do track, for example. Well, I couldn't do track, because I had to go home and take care of the chickens. But, that's okay. I probably wasn't that great in track anyway.

Q: By the time you were reaching senior status, what were you thinking? Your father had not gone to college, but your mother had. How were you being pointed?

TWINING: My father and his brothers never had the chance to go on to college. My father felt very strongly that his sons were going to go to college, even if he had to sacrifice to make sure it happened. And a seed had been planted in my mind by the French teacher who taught me my beginning French for three years... Early on, I was going to take Spanish, and I remember her saying, "A nice career is diplomacy, and French is the language of diplomacy." That advice helped establish the direction my life was going to take.

Q: What were your options for further education? You graduated in 1958?



TWINING: Yes, 1958. At that point, I had some options. I was accepted at various schools, but I decided to go to University of Virginia, even though I was out of state. It had the kind of program that looked of interest. It had good foreign affairs courses, government courses, economics courses, and history courses. Once at the University of Virginia, I probably took as many history courses as anything else.

Q: So, University of Virginia from 1958 to 1962?

TWINING: Yes, sir.

Q: One always hears the reputation of the University of Virginia as being filled with guys washed in beer, a great party school. You were a country boy. How did you find this?

TWINING: The first thing that surprised me was how many students, who were virtually all male at that time, had gone to wonderful prep schools. At first, I was impressed with these fellows with lots of money and wonderful educations. I wasn't sure that I could compete academically. Then there was the party scene. Frankly, I didn't have money for all those parties. It was just part of the adjustment process. Those fellows who went to prep school had a fine education. They were also doing the partying often. I found out that my grades were better than their grades. I was a member of the University's glee club, attended lots of evening lectures and cultural activities, interacted with the foreign students. I had the time to do those kinds of things that didn't require prep school education or money.

Q: This is a difficult time for Virginia. As desegregation started creeping in, it was one of the hard-line states. In fact, it shut down its public school system. How did you find it when you got there?

TWINING: Charlottesville is a different kind of place. Charlottesville was one of the several places in Virginia that refused to shut down the public school system, which did proceed to integrate. There were demonstrations while I was there. There was a demonstration at the movie theater, and finally that got integrated. Things were happening during that period. We all followed what was happening beginning with the lunch counter sit-in down in North Carolina at the time. Yet, after the University of Virginia itself, I don't know when it first had African-American students. But, even in 1958 to 1962, there were African American students. There may not have been many, but there were some. Someone was talking with me the other day about Ralph Bunche. I said, "As a matter of fact, Ralph Bunche spoke at the University of Virginia," at a very difficult period in Charlottesville's history. His gentle but forthright speech charmed a lot of old southern people in the audience as well as all the rest of us students. I did not believe that Charlottesville was really typical of Virginia during that period.



Q: You were there in 1960, during the Kennedy/Nixon election. Did you get involved in the election at all?

TWINING: You couldn't help but think that the election marked some kind of turning point in the U.S. Most of us were still too young to be able to vote in the election, including myself. But, you followed it with great interest. You were pulled between the idealism of Kennedy and the pragmatism of Nixon. I remember being able to argue on both sides, that one should be a pragmatist, but also be idealistic. When I was at Virginia, Senator Ted Kennedy was finishing law school and headed the student forum that I attended. Robert Kennedy came down and spoke. I suppose it inclined me a bit more toward Kennedy than toward Nixon, but it wasn't an open and shut kind of case at that time.

Q: Well, where did you go for dates?

TWINING: Well, I have to admit, I had never been to Charlottesville before I went down for my first day of school in 1958. That's when I discovered that the University of Virginia was virtually all male. We all got to know the nurses in the nursing school. I also discovered the schools for women in the area.

Q: Sweetbriar.

TWINING: Or Mary Washington. So, you would get to know people in those places. You would go down on weekends and so forth, with your buddies. That sort of made it easier.

Q: How about on the more serious side, foreign affairs and all that? How did you find UVA?

TWINING: UVA has a regular foreign affairs department. That is one thing that attracted me to Virginia. I found good courses, enjoying combining foreign affairs with history. So, if I were doing an East Asia history course for example, I tried to do a foreign affairs course that dealt with China, as well. You were able to make nice combinations. In the summer of 1960 I worked as a camp counselor in Brittany, western France. That experience increased my interest in the foreign affairs and history areas.



Q: This is the early 1960s, when all of a sudden it's the American discovery of Africa. We didn't have much in the way of Foreign Service posts there. All of a sudden, these countries were becoming independent. Kennedy made this a big point in "the winds of change," and all that. Did this affect you at all?

TWINING: It did affect me very much. It was exciting following the evolution of non-independent states into independence. I started reading more. I took a course, for example, an intensive seminar with just two students, on South Asia covering the independence struggles in India, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan. That led to my interest in other independence movements, such as in the Ivory Coast or Algeria. So, it did have a real result.

At the end of my senior year, I applied to work in Africa during the summer of 1962 with an organization called Operation Crossroads Africa. This was a wonderful organization founded in 1957 by an African-American minister, the Dr. James Robinson. His objective was to take young Americans and Canadians, black and white, and get them to know both one another and Africa and Africans by traveling to the continent and working together on a project that would benefit a local population. I was accepted into the program. Before we left the U.S., all of us went to the White House and met President Kennedy. With Dr. Robinson and future Vice President Humphreys another keen advocate of strengthening ties with Africa at his side, the President told us that Operation Crossroads Africa had given him the idea for the creation of the Peace Corps. As he spoke of the need to enhance our ties with the peoples of newly emerging Africa, we were all very inspired.

My group of a dozen students was assigned to build a school on the outskirts of Ouagadougou, Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso). Dr. Elliot Skinner, a prominent anthropologist and authority on Upper Volta, headed our group. We lived in the dormitory of a Ouagadougou lycee (high school) with a similar number of Voltaic students. Each day all of us traveled outside the capital city to the small village of Cissin to mix cements, make cinderblocks, and build a one room school, Cissin's first. Needless to say, we Westerners had no more idea than the Voltaic students as to how to build a school, but fortunately the government assigned local workers to "assist" us. The latter were illiterate, but they sure knew how to build. They told us to mix cement, and we mixed cement. They told us to carry blocks here or there, and we did so. We, the mixed student population, may have received the publicity, but we would have built a poor specimen of a building had it not been for the local talent. I believe both African and Western students learned a great deal that summer about humility, but also about cross-cultural and interracial understanding. That experience really nailed down my interest in Africa.



Note that, when I was posted later to Ouagadougou in 1985-88, I took my family out to see that small classroom. It was no longer located "far outside" the city; Cissin was now a part of Ouagadougou and showed an improved standard of living. Our school was standing well, with our picture still posted inside the classroom, but it was surrounded by other, more modern classrooms, leaving one feeling that we had been a sort of catalyst that helped spark a much improved situation in one poor country.

Q: When you graduated in 1962, what were you pointed toward?

TWINING: I wasn't certain what I was pointed toward, to be honest, looking at various possibilities in the international arena. I had started off, in 1962, taking the written exam for the Foreign Service, just to see what would happen. I wasn't terribly committed one way or the other. I went to Ouagadougou, came back, and entered the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. Ouagadougou convinced me that I wanted to do African studies, which I pursued at SAIS for two years. Meanwhile, the process was underway for the oral exam for the Foreign Service, security clearance, and medical exam. It was all being done without my being absolutely sure that that is what I wanted to go into.

Q: At SAIS, how were they presenting Africa? Would you say that this was part of an idealistic time, or realistic, or pessimistic? How did you think it was being presented at that time?

TWINING: It was fairly idealistic. There were already several wonderful programs in African studies in the United States, such as at UCLA and Northwestern. SAIS was a little later in getting its African studies program established, but it not only had two full time professors, it also drew enormously on part-time professors, people moonlighting from the Department of State and the World Bank. A wonderful man from State's INR who taught the West Africa course...

Q: Who was that?

TWINING: His name was Robert Baum.

Q: Oh, yes. Robert Baum was my boss, around 1960 to 1962.



TWINING: He was a wonderful teacher. It's funny; we still talk about him, when I get together with the former students. I'd say that the teachers who were at SAIS, were... I'm not sure idealistic is the right term. I think we students were far more idealistic. I think these were people with their feet firmly on the ground, with genuine interest in Africa. They had lived there, worked there. This was an older generation that I don't think was as much touched by the idealism. Those of us who were students of African studies in 1962, 1963, 1964, were able to go to things like Kenyan Independence Day in Washington. We all knew lots of African students who were our same ages, early twenties. Kennedy's idealism caught on as well, so the combination made us all idealistic, especially at the student level.

Q: Do you remember your Foreign Service oral exam?

TWINING: In mid-1963. I was earning my livelihood when school let out, by helping to move the SAIS library from Florida Avenue to the present location on Massachusetts Avenue. There was a variety of questions on the exam. I suspect every oral is a bit different. I remember very clearly the question, "What would you do if you were in a culture that was in full revolt, and it was dangerous for any American to stay there, and you were in an embassy. You were told that you have to go get those missionaries who have lived here forever, to leave. What would you do?" You could say that you could order them to leave but that would be wrong, because we can't order anyone to leave, other than those associated with the U.S. government. Or you could try to cajole them into leaving. That was one interesting exercise. I remember clearly another one, though. They asked me about my knowledge of the United States. For example, "What is the largest cotton producing state in the United States?" Ironically, I had gone out with a geography friend the night before, who said that I should know what the cotton producing states are in the United States. So, that helped.

Q: Was it California?

TWINING: I think it was Texas, if I remember correctly. At the same time, I messed up on some other questions about the U.S., because I hadn't traveled around the U.S. I was a farm boy. What saved me was that I had arranged with two friends from SAIS, once we finished moving the library, to drive out west. We would drive around the U.S. I told the examiners that I was sorry I wasn't as up on American things as I should be, but incidentally, I'd be touring all around the United States very shortly. I think somehow that helped get me through.

Q: Did you concentrate on a particular area at SAIS? Was it African, generically, or was it West Africa/East Africa?



TWINING: No. SAIS was simply not that specialized. It would have one West Africa course. It would have one South Africa course. It would have one course each in cultural anthropology, African economics, urbanization in Africa. It made you a generalist in African studies. One of the good things about SAIS, even today, is that you don't graduate unless you are judged to be fluent in a language. It really made me work harder than ever on my French and went together well with African studies. With all the former French colonies on the continent, it just made good sense.

Q: How did you find your trip around the United States?

TWINING: It was an eye opener. It truly was. For example, I had never even heard of the Bureau of Land Management before. I would start talking to ranchers and they would say, "The doggoned people in the BLM. You can't imagine what they are trying to do with our land." This kind of thing. I learned about attitudes toward the "distant" U.S. government. You saw an independence of spirit demonstrated. I had all kinds of experiences. My friends and I slept in a park in Las Vegas. I hitchhiked up the California coast, to Canada, then across the continent. That really opened my eyes about how large and diverse both countries are, increasing my appreciation.

Q: When you came back, was the Foreign Service in the offing?

TWINING: When I came back from the western trip, I finished up my last year at SAIS. Toward the end of that second year, my draft board was interested in me. I went down and actually signed up for a military unit that I would enter after SAIS. I wanted to choose what I went into, rather than just be drafted. Lo and behold, as I was finishing an overdue paper in June 1964, I had a call from the State Department. It suddenly had the budget to bring in one more class on the last day of the fiscal year, June 30, and they asked if I wanted to come in then. I replied that I had already signed up with the army. The State Department official said that this might be my only chance to come into the State Department: "Take it or leave it." I said, "If I have to choose, and we're able to arrange things, I'll go with the State Department." Thus it was that, 38 years later, I retired from the State Department.

Q: Well, how did you get out of the military?

TWINING: The State Department official said, "Let us deal with that problem." So, I did. The irony of it all was that my second tour was Vietnam, with the State Department. At the end of that second tour, I received my draft notice. It was after I had gone through Tet attacks and all kinds of things. There again, wise heads prevailed. If you had just been going through years in Vietnam, it was sort of crazy to draft you into the Army to go back into Vietnam.



Q: So, you came in in 1964?

TWINING: Yes, 1964.

Q: What was your class like? Your basic officer course like.

TWINING: My entering class consisted of approximately 32 Foreign Service officers, destined for careers at State or USIA. It had some diversity, but nowhere as much as we have today, unfortunately. I had expected to see mostly Ivy League types but was pleasantly surprised to find a genuine cross-section of American society from across the U.S., with only a few Ivy Leaguers among us. There were some officers with impressive academic credentials, others with experience in living abroad, such as with Peace Corps, others with backgrounds in literature, economics, or business. Our training took place in the old Foreign Service Institute, in Arlington Towers in Roslyn, northern Virginia. The most valuable part for me was learning about visa issuance, which has stood me in good stead ever since that time.

Q: What was the attitude in the class? Were they in this for long-term, or just to give it a whirl?

TWINING: I would say that all believed we were in it for the long term. It turned out that several dropped out within months because personal things happened in their lives, and they couldn't reconcile the two commitments. But, otherwise people were in it for the long term. I was the last of my class to retire in 2002.

Q: When you went in, were you asked what you wanted to do and where you wanted to go?

TWINING: Well, they always ask where you want to go and what you want to do, but I don't think it makes much difference.

Q: No.

TWINING: In any case, I did get Africa as my first assignment. At first, though it had the budget to bring us on board on June 30th, State didn't have the money to send us abroad. After my A-100 course, my entry level course, I ended up working in the office of the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, G. Mennen Williams, for three or four months, as one of the staff assistants. But I knew at that time what my onward assignment was: Madagascar.



Q: I realize you were pretty far down, but did you get a feel for African Assistant Secretary GM Williams, at that time?

TWINING: I interacted with him a fair amount as a staff assistant. He was an idealist. Former governor of Michigan and a member of the Williams family that made the aftershave lotions, Williams was personally selected by President Kennedy for the Africa position. Williams represented Kennedy well in his desire to reach out to the new nations. Williams would always try to do what was right. He considered that you could do what was right for Africa at the same time that you did what was right for the United States. It was a spark of idealism in those days that fit together well with the optimistic mood of the African leaders. What disasters had you had in Africa at that time? The principal one was chaos in Congo-Kinshasa. Apart from that, Africa was still doing okay, relatively speaking. Williams was a good American representative. He, like many of us, hoped in hindsight, naïvely to keep the Cold War away from the continent and emphasize stability and development instead.

Q: While you were there, could you see an African core beginning to coalesce young officers and mid-level officers?

TWINING: That is a very good question, because the Africa core really was then just starting. There had been, in the 1950s, of course, some people who worked on Africa, but not very many, and they often lacked the academic knowledge of Africa that you would have seen subsequently in the 1960s. But, again, the United States wasn't giving much attention to Africa before 1961, so maybe it was unrealistic to expect more than a handful of people to be involved. Those who were were often from the old Foreign Service. In the old Foreign Service, if you spoke French, your career circuit would be France, French speaking Africa and Indochina. I was probably at the tail end of that tradition, even though I never had France. The same with Portuguese, because you would do a certain circuit. That is what was expected of you. The assignment pattern has changed radically since that time. But the core of modern Africanists got started in the early 1960s. People came in with better academic preparation and on the ground experience. With most of Africa becoming independent, we needed more people to staff our brand new embassies, forcing an Africa core to develop more extensively.

Q: Did you also see this as being a place where there was more opportunity? If you ended up going from one embassy in Europe to another, with the political appointees at the top, it was really hard to get into that cadre. In Africa, none of the political types were particularly interested.

TWINING: You're absolutely right. You realized that in Africa you probably had more chance to have responsibility as a young officer. You had more opportunity to go up the ladder than you would if you were a European specialist, for example.



Q: When you were working in various offices, did you get a feel for how the African bureau stood, vis-a-vis other bureaus?

TWINING: Well, it was clear that the African Bureau was the "weak sister," if you will. The European Bureau was the big one, the one with the clout. The African Bureau had been basically established a few years earlier. Yes, it was a little bit of an uphill battle, I suppose, bureaucratically, but at the same time, the idealism that the Kennedy-era brought in was an asset. Attention was given Africa and its new leaders in a way that might not have been the case if Nixon had won in 1960.

Q: Did any of the African leaders go through Washington while you were there?

TWINING: Those were the days when we had numerous official and state visits. The president would meet his counterpart at the airport, and they would ride together into town. I remember distinctly going up to Pennsylvania Avenue and watching President Kennedy and Haile Selassie driving in. You had those kinds of opportunities, whether studying at SAIS or working at State. African leaders would sometimes come to Howard University. We would go over to see them there. You had good exposure.

Q: With regards to your assignment in Madagascar, were you told you would be in Williams' office until a certain point, and then go?

TWINING: Yes.

Q: Madagascar is always off the charts, as far as Africa goes. What were you hearing about Madagascar?

TWINING: Before I went, my focus had been on continental Africa. I must admit I'm not sure I knew a great deal about Madagascar, except how Madagascar had gone through some difficult periods, with a lot of bloodletting particularly in 1947. I knew about the leadership of Madagascar, because the president, Philibert Tsiranana, had worked with other Francophone African leaders, almost like a club, prior to, and just after, independence. What I knew less of was cultural. Most of the Malagasy people's ancestors arrived on a Kon-Tiki type voyage from Polynesia a thousand years earlier. Africans mixed in later, coming from the mainland. I had a lot to learn in that regard.



Q: Today is the 9th of June 2004. You went to Madagascar when?

TWINING: I went to Madagascar late in 1964.

Q: You were there from when to when?

TWINING: November 1964 until October of 1966, when I was pulled out just before the end of my tour for the urgent need in Vietnam.

Q: Let's talk about Madagascar. Was it the great red island, or something?

TWINING: The great red island, based on the color of the soil.

Q: In 1964, when you first got there, what was going on in Madagascar? What kind of government, economy, American interest and all?

TWINING: When I went in 1964 Madagascar had been independent for four years. It had the regime that basically had been left in place when the French pulled out in 1960. The French continued to have considerable influence. The neo-colonial label has been applied to that situation, but at the same time, it wasn't simply a one-party state which followed French orders; there was an active opposition that had to be reckoned with. This was true especially in the capital city, controlled by a communist opposition party, which made the internal political scene a bit more interesting. Madagascar, at that time, was relatively rich. It was feeding itself and exporting something like 200,000 tons of rice annually, which I would contrast with the mid-1970s, when Madagascar embarked upon a revolution directed by a young naval officer, Lt. Cdr. Didier Ratsiraka. From then on it became a rice deficit state (rice being the main staple), which made me start to wonder about the merits of revolutions. In any case, the U.S. interest wasn't very great.

Apart from its vanilla, perhaps the most important U.S. interest at that time was a NASA tracking station outside the capital, Tananarive. It was important to maintain access from the Malagasy to operate the station, to let the NASA people come and go as well as the subcontractors, Bendix. It was an interesting operation. We enjoyed inviting Malagasy officials to this completely open operation and watch the tracking of a space capsule. President Johnson contributed to Malagasy interest when he sent just returned astronauts Gordon Cooper and Charles Conrad to Madagascar in a Presidential jet to thank the government and people for supporting their space flight.



Madagascar is a fascinating place. I mentioned before the variety of the people. They were mostly Polynesians, speaking a non-African language. Some 80 percent of the flora and fauna is simply unique in the world. The embassy provided support to scientific expeditions. The San Diego zoo would come for lemurs. There was an expedition once from an American university looking for fossils of early reptiles, early dinosaurs, and early mammals. I have somewhere in my effects, as a thank you from that expedition, a bone from a prehistoric rhinoceros. I never realized that there had ever been rhinos anywhere in Madagascar, but it probably went back to the time when Madagascar was attached to the African continent. All of these things kept your interest engaged.

Q: What was your job?

TWINING: It really was an ideal job. It was a small embassy. State had already switched to the idea of rotating a young officer around an embassy. I was rotated as much as anyone I think could be rotated. I always did the consular work, but then I would also do part-time political, economic or commercial work. I did administrative and general services work, e.g., getting furniture into embassy houses. I prepared the embassy budget. I went over to the U.S. cultural center for three months, and did public affairs and cultural work, and taught English. It was really an ideal, hands on learning experience that it is possible to have in a small place. It often meant filling in when no one else was available to do the job. It convinced me of the need for a young foreign service officer to get as wide a variety of experiences early on as humanly possible, advice I pass on to new officers. You may discover that you enjoy preparing the embassy budget much more than you enjoy stamping visas, for example. But, you can't find out unless you do both.

Q: Looking at the embassy a touch, who was the ambassador? Talk a little bit about some of the personalities, DCM, ambassador and all, how they operated.

TWINING: It was an interesting mix. The ambassador was one of the early Africa hands from the 1950s named Vaughan Ferguson. As I mentioned before, we didn't have very many old Africa hands. He was of that earlier generation. The deputy chief of mission was someone who escaped the Holocaust and came to America, named Robert Eisenberg. He was very good, an economist. He was replaced by another old Africa hand, John (Pat) Cunningham. They were my supervisors, my teachers. These Africa hands could tell you about the colonial period and the evolution to independence. You could always learn a great deal from them.

Q: How about the Malagasy? How did you find dealing with them?



TWINING: For all of us, our first post is memorable. I tried to learn Malagasy, the national language. I had many Malagasy friends. I was single at the time. There was another single officer, Philip Pillsbury, with USIA, with a far better command of the language. We teamed up, and often we would show American films out in villages. We would interact with university and secondary high school students. The Malagasy are by and large a gentle people, as you would expect for those whose ancestors came from the South Pacific. Because they had been very much isolated after they settled in Madagascar, they evolved their own gentle kinds of music and dances and cultural traditions. It was just very pleasant.

Q: Had the French done what they had done in some other places? Some of the leaders would say, "Go to Paris", and "Come back and be poets." Had they done much of this?

TWINING: The French supported French-oriented education. Indeed, one of the most famous people in Madagascar was a man who had gone to be educated in France, named Jacques Rabemananjara, who became a poet. But he was also a political figure. The French educated at least a certain elite group of Malagasy, particularly among the more pure-blooded Polynesian stock. They went to Paris or to the French Colonial School in Dakar. They did a fairly decent job of educating an elite group. The education system in Madagascar after the French departed was a rather lively system. I have often felt that different colonial powers stack up differently when you look at their legacy, with the French and the British at the top of the list, for at least the efforts that they made in education.

Q: I know very little about the country. But, was there a difference between the highlanders and the lowlanders?

TWINING: Absolutely. There was a big difference between the highlanders and the lowlanders. Madagascar, when I was there, was very much in the hands of the highlanders, particularly those known as the Merina. When the revolution occurred, it was conducted by the lowlanders. So, you had a flip-flopping of the power structure. That indeed was one of Madagascar's problems, trying to integrate the two groups of people.

Q: Were we able to talk to the various parties there? Was there enough of a political life so that we were able to tap into that and talk to people about what was happening?



TWINING: You could, but you were focused particularly on the ruling party and the opposition party that controlled the capital city. Unfortunately, the latter had the communist label attached to it. How communist it was, I don't know. But it made your contacts with its members more suspect. That was difficult. So, often we would try to find out the mood of the country by talking to the students, by talking to some of the business people out in the provinces and so forth. That was frequently as good as talking to parties.

Q: What were their exports? I always think of combs and things like that.

TWINING: No, besides rice Madagascar exports vanilla, semiprecious stones, coffee and sugar. Already, synthetic vanilla was starting to make an impact on the world market. For a country so dependent on one or two primary products it makes a big difference. Madagascar is also known for its large herds of cattle (zebus) and exported some quality beef during my time.

Q: Did we have any AID program, or anything like that there, Peace Corps?

TWINING: Not Peace Corps, which was later. But there was an AID program going on. In a country that always has lots of needs, it is very difficult to know where you best plug in. Do you give infrastructure support? Do you do rural development or seek reform of the financial sector, and so forth? I think AID in those days, with not a lot of money, was also laboring between doing one or the other, unfortunately. To my mind, it called for the need for considerable coordination with other donors, as well as the government, to make sure that we gave useful assistance without duplication of effort. What was awfully nice with the advent of the 1960s was the establishment in independent Africa of a self-help program, funded by AID and implemented by State. One of the things that I could do in Madagascar, which my colleagues elsewhere in Africa also did, was to go to a village where perhaps the people needed a bridge or classroom or health station. We could pay for the materials while the local villagers could contribute the labor, or the sand, etc., to complete the project. It is invariably a very modest program, but effective because it reached the people.

Q: You mentioned you went with Phil Pillsbury out into the boonies, to show movies. What kind of films were you showing?



TWINING: Those were wonderful days when the United States Information Agency had money to make beautiful films, as you remember. You might have a film on America's leading cities. You might have a film on America's agriculture, the American cowboy, or race relations. They were great films to tell the world about America. There were also AID films about good health and hygiene. It was part of trying to get people to know and understand America. Madagascar is far away. If they knew anything about a foreign country, it wasn't even neighboring East Africa; it was generally France. We wanted to broaden their horizons.

Q: Well, within the embassy, was there a feeling that there was competition with France?

TWINING: I suppose there was a feeling of competition with France. Yet, you realized you had to work with the French. Ministries still had French advisors at that time. You often would work with those French advisors, as you worked with the Malagasy principals. But it was an unequal relationship between the U.S. and France. We were sort of a small fellow next to the big giant. The French had big aid programs, and lots of people, both in the business community and as government advisors, it was an unequal contest. It would have been crazy for us to be competing with them.

Q: Were the Soviets there?

TWINING: No, not in Madagascar. I think the reason was partly because the people in power were afraid that having communist embassies there would serve as a conduit to the main opposition party. They did not let the Soviet bloc into the country, at that time.

Q: What was life at the embassy like, for you?

TWINING: Because it was a small embassy, you interacted easily with the five or six Americans, both officers and staff members who were at the embassy, as well as its talented Malagasy personnel, but your life couldn't really evolve around the embassy. There just wasn't enough there. You wanted variety, so one's life was much more involved with Malagasy friends, and your foreign friends, and travel around that beautiful country. It was a good balance.

Q: How about the Malagasies, as people to get to know. How did you find them?



TWINING: I found them generally very eager to get to know Americans. There was always the aura of the American myth, as portrayed by Hollywood. They would see films, like anybody did, when they were available. I think they were curious about us. If you learned some of the language, or at least maintained your French, it was easy to have access not only to people, but also to their homes. They were very approachable.

Q: During this 1964 to 1966 period, were there any problems, tempted coups, earthquakes, visits of high-ranking people, or anything?

TWINING: Happily there were neither coup attempts nor earthquakes, though Madagascar was on the receiving end of some vicious cyclones.

Q: What was the role of the military?

TWINING: One of my activities involved supporting our small Air Attaché's office, as we sought to get to know the younger Malagasy military officers. Besides being fun, it was a way to feel out what they were thinking, how ambitious they were for power. Were they discontent at all? What should they be doing, aiming for? What we saw were military officers who were still trying to determine what their role should be. We noticed the attention they paid, and their sensitivity to, coup attempts made by military officers over on the African continent. When we asked for their reactions, they would reply vaguely that the Malagasy military did not need to take such actions, but we had to wonder what was in the backs of their minds. Note that, when there was a transition of power in 1972, it went first to the Army chief, General Ramanantsoa, assisted in governing by a number of those same officers with whom we had socialized. He was overthrown in 1975 by one of the younger, radical members of the officer corps, Lt. Cdr. Ratsiraka, who went on to start the revolution in Madagascar, removed fellow officers from power, adopted Marxism-Leninism, and nationalized most of the economy. Curiously, I found myself remotely touched by all this later when the Government of Madagascar informed the American Embassy in 1976 that it had declared me persona non grata. Since this was a decade after I had departed the Great Red Island, the Embassy requested an explanation. It was told that my car which I had sold when I departed had been spotted moving around town, and therefore I must be in the country. Such is the paranoia generated in a revolution.

Q: Did you cover other areas besides Madagascar?



TWINING: As part of an assignment to Tananarive in those days, you were given consular accreditation to a dozen or more small islands in the Indian Ocean extending down toward Antarctica, e.g., Kerguelen, the Crozet Islands, as well as the British colony of Mauritius, the then French colony of the Comoro Islands, and the French Department of Reunion. This was done primarily so that, if there were ever a consular emergency on one of these often remote locations, we had legal authority to do any necessary consular work to protect American citizens. I traveled to Mauritius, the Comoros, and Reunion to meet any American citizens and provide some basic consular services, as well as to look at their political and economic situations. We also read regularly their newspapers, met their nationals, and issued them visas back in Madagascar. Even then, Mauritius was a jewel. Port Louis was a sleepy capital, with the British firmly in charge and seemingly suspicious of what I was up to. The Comoros were even sleepier. The French were still in control but more relaxed than the British about my meeting any local person I wished. One could only wonder whether the four islands of the Comoros could even constitute a self-sufficient nation, despite its basic production of ylang-ylang (used in the making of perfume), whose incredible sweet smell permeated the air. One had the idea that Reunion was a backwater for the French. U.S. connections were minimal on that poor island, consisting of three large, and lovely, volcanic craters. It was the only place during my entire Foreign Service career where a nasty French customs official insisted on going through every single item in my suitcase, regardless of my diplomatic passport.

Q: Did the Malagasy feel African?

TWINING: That was part of the problem. Even the early African institutions, before the Organization of African Unity was formed, seemed to attach Madagascar on as almost an afterthought. The Malagasy felt different from the Africans. They felt generally superior to the Africans. Their skin was lighter, often a pretty, light brown skin. Their country didn't have some of the chaotic happenings that they heard about in the Congo. They were "above that" they thought. We tried to tell them, "Look, who are your neighbors? It's not the U.S., it's not France, it is Mozambique, and South Africa, Kenya, and Tanzania." We would urge them to work with the Africans, to feel part of the African... not continent, but perhaps of the African movements. Eventually, that came to pass, but the original attitude was very much that they were different and better.

Q: Was there any affinity to India, or Arabia?

TWINING: There was a little bit of both. It's an interesting question. Remember that Zanzibar is not very far from Africa. Zanzibar was then controlled, at least in part (and accounting for some of its problems), by Omanis, for example. Dhows came down the East African coast; Madagascar wasn't relieved completely from that movement. So, they were sensitive, I think, to that part of the Middle East.



India was another interesting issue. You had Indian merchants in Madagascar. The Indians were present in South Africa. The Indians were present, especially in neighboring Mauritius. So, there was some link with India without the Malagasy feeling themselves tied into the subcontinent.

Q: Did they look toward the Ocean much, or not?

TWINING: It depended. Those who were in control at that time were the highlanders. Frankly, with their state of roads, they felt fairly removed from the oceans. You are up at a high elevation when you live in Tananarive. You had to make an effort to get over to the ocean. Yet, the ocean was also their lifeline. They had a railroad down to the ocean, to the port of Tamatave. The goods came in through that port and went out through that port. No, it was more the coastal people, as you would expect, who felt that they were part of a maritime tradition. This was just one more element that separated the two groups of people.

Q: Did we put military ships in there, making port calls?

TWINING: Rarely. Even today, very few military ships go to the southern Indian Ocean. It's just too far off the sea-lanes. While I was there, we had one U.S. Navy ship visit. You would have a U.S. commercial vessel passing through every once in a while. Those were the days when we received our magazines and so forth by sea pouch. It would take six months for the sea pouch to arrive there. So, you were happy when you had a U.S. ship that was coming through. No, there wasn't very much contact of that nature.

Q: This was your first post, wasn't it?

TWINING: Yes.

Q: How did you feel about Foreign Service work after this?

TWINING: Well, I was very enthusiastic about Foreign Service work after that, partly because I had the opportunity to try some of the aspects of it, partly because I suppose you were a semi-big fish in a small pond. You enjoyed the cultural interaction. After two years there, I felt very strongly that the Foreign Service was indeed what I wanted to make as a career.



Q: Did you feel, or did your fellow officers ever feel that they were somewhat removed from the African Bureau?

TWINING: In Madagascar you felt yourself to be distant from the rest of the world, including Washington. The African Bureau was never quite sure where to place Madagascar within the Bureau. It wasn't part of East Africa; it wasn't part of Southern Africa. You were a bit of a stepchild. Again, communication was slower in those days. You had to type out your telegrams, and hope you didn't make a mistake, and then the code person would retype the telegrams. One would avoid long or unnecessary telegraphic traffic. You would send things back by pouch, longer dispatches, but they would take forever to get there. You had a diplomatic courier from Frankfurt who came through, generally once a week, to exchange a small, classified pouch. But he made lots and lots of other stops. This is how you were tied to Washington and to the African Bureau.

Q: Well, in 1966, you were off? Well, whither?

TWINING: In 1966, I had taken a long trip down through southern Madagascar, a rough, lengthy trip over lots of awful roads. I came back and found a message waiting for me: "You're immediately reassigned to Vietnam." I couldn't believe it. I communicated with Washington to say, "I don't especially want to go to Vietnam. I know nothing about Vietnam, or Asia. I never studied it. I would prefer to finish out my tour in Madagascar, and continue on in the area I know best, Africa." I remember receiving a nice letter back from Washington saying, "We very, very strongly urge you to go to Vietnam. If you do not go to Vietnam, we cannot predict where your career will go. It will be looked at very badly if you do not go." It was only months later that they began assigning every new Foreign Service officer to Vietnam, as you remember. So, with a heavy heart, and not particularly liking what we were doing in Vietnam, I went off to Washington to come to the Foreign Service Institute. There, I found uncertainty as to who was going to train the State Department people who were being detailed to work in Vietnam for the Agency for International Development, like myself. So, I ended up being trained a bit by State and a bit by AID. I went off to Vietnam in November 1966.

Q: What sort of training were you getting?

TWINING: The U.S. build-up in Vietnam both civilian and military was well underway during the four weeks I spent in training at the Foreign Service Institute in October-November 1966. This was not the Vietnam Training Center, which supported the more intensive, longer term training. This was purely FSI, where I was in a group of 20 or so State and AID people, many in the same "less than voluntary" category as myself. We were the only group going through this "fast track" training at the time.



The State training was an abbreviated area studies program focused solely on Vietnam, its history, culture, and present situation. Most notable among the speakers was the legendary, and somber, Bernard Fall who, having written extensively about the difficult, pre-1954 French involvement there, left us with a sense of dĩĩ½jĩ½ vu. Another speaker, a longtime State Department Asia hand, was also hardly encouraging. I recall him saying in particular, that "If you think the Vietnamese like us, you have another thing coming. They hate us, and you are going to find that out as soon as you get there, so remember that." Not terribly encouraging, it was still preferable to receive these kinds of doses of reality than to see 1966 Vietnam through rose-tinted glasses. USIA officer Frank Scotten, known to have done a good job of reaching out to Vietnamese during his own assignment to that country, also came to our class to give his perspective that we were going into work where results were possible. We were encouraged at FSI to do considerable reading about insurgency, especially the recent one in Malaysia as presented by Sir Robert Thompson, and I benefited greatly from that opportunity to read. The AID training consisted of lectures regarding AID operations and procedures, particularly as tailored to Vietnam, but also about development in Asia. Note that I had specifically requested Vietnamese language training prior to leaving for Vietnam but was told there was no time. Through language, one learns about culture, the people. I often felt that my lack of opportunity for language training because there was "no time" was symptomatic of one of our major mistakes in Vietnam: wand I include myself in that groudid not know the country and, thus, could not be especially effective, or if we were, it was only after a long time of learning things the hard way and making mistakes en route.

I left for Saigon in mid-November 1966, arriving in a grim looking city already marked by the military build-up and in the midst of seemingly non-stop rains. On the civilian side, we seemed to be building up faster than our institutional capacity could support. I was assigned to AID as an area development officer. (Soon after my arrival, AID changed its name to the Office of Civil Operations or OCO, and the following year to CORDS, as civilian and military advisory efforts were combined together). As was typical at the time, AID scheduled new arrivals to tour several provinces to get a feel for both the country and the work. Traveling with fellow FSO Robert Myers, the trip was a good experience. Both of us were particularly taken with the highlands and were subsequently assigned to that region, Bob to BanMeThuot and I to Dalat, the capital of then Tuyen Duc province, now Lam Dong. I chuckle over the recollection of Col. Jake Jacobsen, one of the well known officials at Embassy Saigon at the time, telling me when he sent me to Dalat, "we want to take care of our FSO's."



And, indeed, Dalat was a lovely place to be posted. Tantamount to a large village, it had been a French hill station in colonial days. At 1500 meters altitude, one was far from the climate of hot, muggy Saigon. Instead, the climate was cool and healthy. You ate wonderful strawberries and all kinds of other fruits and vegetables. I would get up in morning, go out into the brisk air and look to the north at the beautiful twin peaks of Lang Bian Mountain (which I eventually climbed and one of which became the location for a U.S. radar site to guide B-52 bombers on their raids into the North). The scene was lovely. On Sundays I would sometimes go to the old French hotel, the Dalat Palace, and order good French coffee and French bread and jelly, a very pleasant pastime.

Q: In the old Swiss village.

TWINING: Dalat was like a beautiful little Swiss village.

Q: Yes.

TWINING: It was idyllic, in many ways, had there been no insurgency there. That's where I spent the next two years.

Q: You were there from late 1966 until?

TWINING: Until the end of 1968. I spent two full years there. I have to confess, when I got there, my attitude wasn't the greatest. They said there was no time to learn Vietnamese. "Just get out there and win the hearts and minds." I had heard that the Vietnamese were all corrupt and that they hated us. I had to make up my mind about where I would fit in Vietnam, as well as improve my negative attitude. So, I decided that as the province was predominately Montagnard, I would learn the Montagnard language, Koho. This is a language of the Mon-Khmer principal family of languages. I thought I would work especially with the Montagnard, not those "bad" Vietnamese. After a while, I realized I was in Vietnam, and the Montagnards were just one of its elements, with ethnic Vietnamese deserving my similar interaction, that it was important to make sure one balanced one's efforts. If I was to do my part in winning hearts and minds, I had to work with all the people of Vietnam, and not just in my program work. Thus, once I felt I had Koho under my belt (thanks to lessons given me at night by a USAID employee named Cil Dinh using a local Christian and Missionary Alliance textbook), I attended night class to study Vietnamese, up until the Tet attacks of early 1968.

Q: What was your work situation?



TWINING: I was assigned in late 1966 to a small provincial team of AID officers as a deputy provincial advisor. The senior provincial representative through the end of 1967 had been in Vietnam since 1963. First with International Voluntary Services (a private group similar to our Peace Corps) as an agricultural worker, then with AID in the same area, Donald Wadley was a farm boy from Utah. He spoke excellent Vietnamese and did not mind getting his hands dirty working with local farmers. The second American officer was an AID employee, former PCV Bernard Salvo, who ran the self-help program. I was the third, replacing FSO Fred Ashley, with responsibility for Montagnard affairs (e.g., development), health, and refugees, as well as assisting with self-help. Our jobs were to work with our Government of Vietnam counterparts to promote development as an alternative to what the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese had to offer. AID also posted in Dalat while I was there an agricultural advisor, Ike Hatchimonji, and for shorter periods rural electrification, nursing, logistics, and public administration personnel. The unheralded ones in our AID office, those with particular courage, were the eight or so local personnel without whose knowledge and language skills we would have been helpless. What was vital for us all, was to be out and about the province with local officials, watching over projects, giving advice and support, and keeping an eye on the situation. In addition, we had to keep the regional AID headquarters in Nha Trang informed about developments. Travel was generally by road, though we received both USAID and U.S. military helicopter support in order to visit remote areas and dispatch supplies to them.

We also had in Dalat a one-man USIS operation represented by Don Soergel, then by John Keller, as well as an Agency representative who concentrated on internal security matters. There was a small U.S. military unit in Dalat to work with Vietnamese military personnel, and even smaller detachments in each of the three districts. One of their tasks was to complete with their counterparts the monthly Hamlet Evaluation Surveys, which we then reviewed in the provinces, an exercise aimed at quantifying the situation and one that few of us believed was useful.

Q: In the first place, what was the situation in Dalat between 1966 and 1968?

TWINING: Tuyen Duc province had been largely spared the war, when I got there. Indeed, there was evidence that started accumulating that Dalat was a bit of an R&R center for some of the Viet Cong. When they got tired of being out in the jungle, they would come in and relax in Dalat. With only scattered, local Viet Cong and no NVA, the province was relatively safe when I arrived. It was also somewhat special in that Don Wadley took a very firm stance that we would not spray Agent Orange on any of the forests in the province. He simply felt there was no need to do so.



In the first year I was there, the situation was good. One could easily sleep out in hamlets without fear. It was only at the end of 1967, the beginning of 1968, that something changed. In December 1967, a North Vietnamese battalion came through an isolated Montagnard area in the southern part of the province and massacred a number of innocent people. It was a bad scene. In response, the province first sent in a small team of South Vietnamese and American military personnel to investigate. As the only American official who knew the area, and spoke the language, I offered to go along, but an American Colonel Michaels (deputy CORDS provincial advisor) thought the situation too uncertain. The team was wiped out, including him. People hadn't known anything like that before. We wondered what this incident meant. In early January 1968, another North Vietnamese battalion came through. This time, they were making their way down to the coast. Again, what did it mean? Then at the end of January and beginning of February 1968, we had the famous Tet attacks throughout South Vietnam. The fighting went on longer in Dalat, than anywhere else in Vietnam, except in Hue.

During the fighting in our area, we radioed out reports, but we never heard anything back from the American Embassy, which had its hands full as well. We never heard outside news broadcasts mention the heavy fighting in our area. What we only learned months afterward, was that our reports that we sent out by radio were never received in Saigon. We were basically cut off for several weeks in Dalat. With a major reinforcement ARVN troops and considerable bombing by American planes in Dalat city itself and outside the city, order was finally restored. We would see bodies on the streets. After the Tet attacks of 1968, the province never went back to being that nice, peaceful province that we had known before.

Q: What sort of troops did you have on your side, up in Dalat?

TWINING: There weren't very many. The Vietnamese had some companies of soldiers. The Americans had only the military advisors in the province headquarters, and in the three district capitals. Only with the Tet attacks were we reinforced with Vietnamese battalions.

Q: What was happening on the fighting?

TWINING: In what way?

Q: In other words, if the North Vietnamese, or actually in this case, the Viet Cong (I don't know which were fighting)... What was the fighting over and how did it take place?



TWINING: To the best of my knowledge, the fighting was done by my main force NVA units, supported and guided by local Viet Cong who came out of the woodwork, as they also did in Saigon. Why the lengthy attack on Dalat, plus the attempts to control main areas of the rest of Tuyen Duc province? I suspect the communists wanted to demonstrate that they had no problem taking control of anyplace in the country, including one that the war had basically not touched until January 31, 1968. Dalat was particularly important because of its resort status, a place that high ranking South Vietnamese officials visited for rest and relaxation, and also the location of the Vietnam Military Academy. Dalat represented a symbol of what the communist side resented most; its taking would have had a tremendous psychological impact on the country.

Q: How were you touched yourself in Dalat by the Tet attacks?

TWINING: I was invited to a Vietnamese home the evening of January 31 to celebrate the onset of the Vietnamese New Year. My host warned that there was something in the air and agreed that it would be better for me to return to my home early that evening and stay put. I did so. My house over on the western edge of town was empty; the several Montagnard students who lived in the outbuildings on my compound while they went to school had returned to their home hamlets for the holiday. I was awakened early the next morning by gunfire which seemed to be occurring all around me. I could not get out, so I decided to relax and see what happened next (though I had spotted blood coming up to my front door, from the night before, obviously a bit disconcerting). Later that day my AID colleague Bernard Salvo let a combined Vietnamese and American military unit from the eastern part of town to come and get me out.

At that point he and I and several others relocated to the home of the province senior advisor, FSO Frank Wisner, who had just recently replaced Don Wadley in the senior American position. We stayed there for the rest of the period of fighting of several weeks, taking turns standing guard on the front porch at night, for whatever that was worth.



One night we heard the sound of shovels hitting rock. We couldn't figure out what it was. At daylight, even though we stayed on the porch with our guns, we could see that Viet Cong had dug in all across the street from us. This was in early February 1968. They kept looking at us, and we looked at them. They looked at us some more. Then, a military jeep would go by, and they would start firing at it. After that, they would start looking at us again, and we would look at them. This was similar to a couple of other encounters I had with Viet Cong where I realized they weren't after me; they were after the Vietnamese soldier, who might be nearby. On this day in February, these men were local Viet Cong, as far as we could determine. An artillery strike was called in just afterward ending the situation. But, it was interesting. Either they knew who we were or they couldn't figure out who we were, or because we had been doing all of these small self-help hearts and minds projects, all over the province, all the time, perhaps we were known, and perhaps they said, "These guys are not our enemies, these guys are doing some good things." We couldn't figure it out. It was very strange. It was just one of those interesting incidents that made you wonder about the whole business of the war.

Q: Were you involved in projects there?

TWINING: Yes, absolutely. But, our job with AID was first to push Vietnamese provincial officials to get out of their offices and go and see the people's needs, and get them to try to meet the people's needs with some of the budgetary resources we were providing them through Saigon. Secondly, we also had our own funds, as we did in Africa, to do projects, to build schools or health facilities, or undertake road improvement, or build small bridges.

Thus, it was important to go out, take a local official with you, and make decisions regarding project support, inspect projects underway, and verify their satisfactory completion. Needless to say, one tried one's best during the process to make certain that payoffs were not made to officials higher up or that local village or hamlet authorities did not rake off part of the funds or materials destined for the project. In many ways, this was a very different kind of Foreign Service experience. You were there DOING things, not just writing reports, things you thought could make a difference in people's lives and would come into play when they had to decide which side they were on. We who were doing such provincial work were convinced that development and full stomachs had much more to do with the outcome of the situation in our particular area than military offensives, though these were of course necessary, as well. While a State employee, I was also an employee of AID and expected to do what any other AID person would do. Besides project work, though, we always kept in mind the need to relate to, build up, and hopefully take our lead from, the Vietnamese official, support him when he was doing the right thing and make known our views privately when it was otherwise. If an official proved recalcitrant or incompetent, the American in charge (Wadley/Wisner) would take the problem up the ladder to the province chief or mayor, hopefully for resolution. Needless to say, in the conduct of our work we picked up information about what was happening, information we conveyed to the regional office in Nha Trang and to personnel of Embassy Saigon.



There was a particular aspect of my own duties worth noting. Because Tuyen Duc province had a majority Montagnard population (Lat, Cil, Sre, Chru, and Maa ethnic groups), it was important in a Vietnamese administration to reach out to them. This is just like one would do with ethnic Vietnamese, but there was a special angle to the Montagnards. During French days the Montagnards received special attention and sympathy from the French, leading to Montagnard belief that they could become independent or autonomous, despite the fact they were located physically in the midst of a far larger Vietnamese population. This was unrealistic. It went nowhere with the French, and it made no sense to us. If we did not give the Montagnards the attention and aid needed, incorporating them into the overall activity of the province, we would only add fuel to the incipient fire of their independence movement. Fortunately, I had several good Montagnard and Vietnamese counterparts who saw things the same way and proved to be excellent working partners, and I was well supported by my other American colleagues in Dalat and by our small but interested and active Office of Montagnard Affairs at AID/OCO/CORDS in Saigon, FSOs Robert P. Meyers and James McNaughton. Unlike some other parts of the Vietnamese highlands, I was pleased that we never had a separatist problem in Tuyen Duc province.

Q: How did you find the representatives of the Vietnamese government in Dalat?

TWINING: They were a mixed bag. Some of them just wanted money in their pockets; others just wanted to survive with as little risk to themselves as humanly possible. Others were very conscientious and took risks that would often astonish me. So, it was a mixed bag. I can't say they were all one type or another type. But, some of those who really did take chances, and slept out in hamlets, at risk to themselves, which I often did with them, too, were great. I frequently wonder what happened to them when the communists did take over in 1975.

Q: Well, you were there for two years. Did you get out and around? What did you do for social life?

TWINING: Well, that's a good question. In a small provincial town anywhere in the world, there often is not a lot of social life. But like a Peace Corps volunteer finds in a village, there are things to do, and you make the most of your situation. You interacted with people. You studied language in the evening, or read. International Voluntary Services had several people there who were good people, including a current State Department official, Richard Beaird. There were missionaries of various nationalities present in the province. I never felt that my life was lacking something. I tried in principle to sleep in a hamlet one night a week, just to get a feel for the hamlet, and the people's attitudes and the like. Often, you ended up in a bed with several other people, which didn't make for a great night's sleep. But it was a way of getting a better feel for the country and strengthening your language and diplomatic skills.



Q: Well, going out and sleeping in a hamlet, were you finding it dangerous?

TWINING: I think in our business, whether you are assigned to Saudi Arabia or Iraq or Vietnam, or Cambodia, you learn to judge what the risks are. If you're going along a small highway, and you don't see a soul, then you have to think twice about whether there is some problem up ahead. You do this on the basis of your own information. It's true, once in a while, that there would be firing nearby, so you get under the bed, or down on the floor. Those are just the realities of things. You'll also find that if you are in a village, you're putting your trust in villagers. They try to protect you. If they feel they can't protect you, or feel at too much risk themselves, they will tell you honestly that it is probably too dangerous for you to stay here. That's fine. So, that's the way it works.

Q: Did you feel the hand of our American military, at all?

TWINING: You only felt it from time to time. Again, the American military presence in the province was small. It was not oppressive. We did have to try to make sure we communicated, interacted between the two of us, to avoid frictions, or differences of perspective. That was okay. There were a couple of times where there were American military actions that you felt the hand of, and which had ramifications. Most American military personnel, just like everybody else, were well behaved. They were trying to do their job.

One negative situation involved a little zoo south of town, when some American soldiers from outside the province were driving up the road and shot the zoo's elephant. The zoo's elephant had been put there by Madame Ngu back in the early 1960s. I still have a foot from that elephant in my household effects. They thought it was funny to shoot the elephant. Well, it wasn't funny. It really made for a lot of ill feeling. We were the ones who had to try to explain it away. Another thing happened that gave me insight into the future. This was in 1968, when the province had become much more insecure. A big American military unit came up the main highway from Saigon. It was a hot day. There was a beautiful river there. The personnel stopped, took their clothes off, and jumped in the river and went swimming. This is all well and good if they're in an isolated area, but they were right next to the highway, right next to the big market. I still remember hearing all these Vietnamese women exclaiming in disgust, "Look at these people." Frankly, it was the kind of thing that did us no good. I had the feeling that when enough of these incidents built up because of actions of a few, due to cultural ignorance, one of these days we were going to get thrown out of Vietnam. Yet, it's hard to control everybody, every minute. We, of course, are finding that in Iraq.

Q: Well, then, how much French? Was your French useful?



TWINING: Yes, my French was useful with the older officials, both Vietnamese and Montagnard. As I noted, the French had a special affinity for the Montagnards, when they were in colonial power, to the point where the Montagnards were hoping the French would give them autonomy in the country, which didn't happen. It was the older Montagnards, and some of the professional Vietnamese doctors and dentists, for example, who had lovely French. Their French was useful. I used my Koho far more. The more Vietnamese I learned, the better off I was, as well.

Q: Did you develop any lasting friendships from your time in Vietnam?

TWINING: Obviously when you leave a post, you continue for a while to exchange greetings and the like with those with whom you had close ties. At this point almost 40 years later, besides Americans who were with me in Dalat there are still several lasting friendships. Two of the Montagnard students who lived in my outbuildings and helped me improve my Kohl and understanding of the cultures, Teh Krajan and Liang Krai, came later to the U.S. as refugees, and we stay in contact. Teh is now head of the accounting department at Millersville University in Pennsylvania. Two Vietnamese whom I had know in Dalat, one a teacher at the time and the other a student at the French lycee there, both found me recently in the U.S. Finally, as I have mentioned elsewhere, the first Vietnamese who courageously had me in his home when I arrived in Dalat in 1966, a professor at Dalat University, Pho Ba Long, later came to the U.S. He found me when I was office director for Indochina in the late 1980s and he was employed at Georgetown University. Our friendship continued when I was envoy to Cambodia, and he headed a business administration education program AID supported there. I will always remain an admirer of Professor Long and his wife, both of whom I saw recently at the Vietnamese Embassy in Washington. One final anecdote: a freelance journalist passed through Phnom Penh in about 1993. She told me she had been traveling just beforehand north of Dalat when an unknown Montagnard who had been a locally elected official in my day approached her out of the blue to ask her to pass along his greetings if she ever encountered me. Happening 25 years after I left Vietnam, that was touching, I confess.

Being in a war situation anywhere also binds you very much to your colleagues with whom you had worked or fought. You had common experiences that unite you. This is true for the Foreign Service personnel who did Vietnam, of course, and almost 40 years later I, like others, have kept those friendships. They include those with whom I was assigned to Dalat as well as others I knew elsewhere in the former South Vietnam, people like David G. Brown, Richard Matheron, Robert P. Myers and James McNaughton. Indeed, when one encounters someone who had the Vietnam experience but not necessarily during your timeframe, e.g., Frederick Z. Brown, John Negroponte, Robert Miller, James Rosenthal, Richard Holbrooke, there, too, the relationship is easy and generally lasting.



Q: Any lessons learned from your Vietnam experience?

TWINING: I think it is very difficult to win hearts and minds at the same time that we are waging a war. It is vital to do so if you want to have any measure of popular support, but we should not have any illusions that it will produce the success for which we hope, particularly when incidents such as a mistaken bombing which kills innocent civilians undoes so much of the good that your civilian programs have accomplished. Secondly, my apprehensions before I even arrived in country about our involvement in the Vietnamese insurgency were borne out as I tried to understand during my time whether we were involved in a struggle against international communism or a civil war. History has shown that it was the latter, of course, and to my way of thinking our involvement was a mistake and a terrible, terrible waste on all sides. When I was at the Vietnamese Embassy function described above in 2004, I was standing with other old retired Vietnam hands from State as the Vietnamese Chargé d'Affaires who would have been barely born when we were in his country spoke of the friendship between our two countries today and the desire to enhance it. We old hands agreed that it was a shame that we had been unwilling fifty years ago to reach out and try to create a similar atmosphere then; history could have been so different. The lesson is to be very careful before we get so entrapped in the internal affairs of a country that we can extract ourselves again only with great difficulty, expense, and something less than honor. We should avoid military involvement if at all possible; diplomacy and patience should always be our principal tool.

Q: Well, in late 1968, whither?

TWINING: You know, in 1968, Robert Kennedy was killed. Martin Luther King was killed. The cities were burning in the United States. While I was probably at the peak of my effectiveness in Vietnam, I realized that I no longer understood what was happening in my own country. So at that point, after two years I said that I would like to go back to Washington.



As to my onward assignment, I informed Personnel at State that I would prefer to move to something different, away from anything military. Thus, true to good bureaucratic practice, I found myself assigned along with several other State and CIA officers to the Armed Forces Staff College in Norfolk for the first half of 1969. It was not a matter of being shunted aside but of State's need to fill its quota of students. The AFSC was a military school which placed emphasis on training military officers to be "gray suited," i.e., broader oriented than just their own military service. Civilian participation was needed to create this wider understanding of the modern world, as well. And, needless to say, we required just as much broadening as our military counterparts. I think all of us benefited from the experience. We had excellent, thought provoking speakers, e.g., General William Westmoreland after being relieved from Vietnam, Governor Averill Harriman after trying to negotiate an end to the war, with all of whom we had good "give and take" discussions. In my daily interaction with up and coming military officers in Norfolk, I certainly saw a different side of the military from the war fighters I had known in Vietnam, professional officers striving to clarify the role of the armed forces and of the U.S. in the modern environment. It was a healthy, learning experience. Following Norfolk, I was assigned to the National Military Command Center at the Pentagon for about six months, then moved over to its State counterpart, the Operations Center, for another six months, until mid-1970.

Q: What were you doing at the Command Center (NMCC)?

TWINING: The Command Center in those days, and perhaps even today, would always have on duty a State Department person, a CIA person, an NSA person. We were there if an issue arose that needed interpretation or coordination. As the link with the State Department, we could inform the general on duty, "Look, from the State Department point of view, it's probably best to wait and feel out the situation before acting." So, it was a liaison position, but it was interesting. State cables came to us in hard copy from the NMCC communications center, and we would read military and other agencies' traffic, as well.

Q: Did you have any crisis to deal with?

TWINING: The most important thing that happened while I was there was the first landing on the moon. The NMCC had this giant screen. Everything stopped so we could see Neil Armstrong put his first footstep down on the moon. I think that was probably the most important thing that happened, as opposed to any crisis, per se.

Q: By this time, it was 1970?



TWINING: Right. At the end of 1969, I transferred over to the State Operations Center, the watch center at the State Department, which was like the NMCC. I worked there until mid-1970. At that point, I was assigned back into my old bureau, the African Bureau.

Q: Let's go back to the Ops Center. What were you doing?

TWINING: When you're in the Operations Center, you read the messages coming in from the field and receive phone calls. You alert people if something needs attention. If there is a coup, or the death of an American, you have to call someone. If you're on the midnight shift, you prepare a summary of developments for the Secretary of State. This is so when he comes in in the morning, he, in that case, William Rogers, would have a succinct summary of the events that happened during the night. You kept an eye on the news tickers, the wire services, to see if anything was happening that required alerting someone. It was just the kind of thing that any watch center does.

Q: Again, did you get there, or were you on watch at any particular major time?

TWINING: What preoccupied the USG in 1969-70 continued to be the war in Indochina. All else paled by comparison. We looked at the reports from our embassies, from the war front, from the bombing missions into North Vietnam. I was on duty when the White House decided to launch the incursion into Cambodia in 1970. Secretary Rogers was at home, and we had to call him in for an emergency meeting on this issue at the White House on a Sunday afternoon. We could not find his driver to pick him up, so he drove into the basement of the Department on his own, where I met him to tell him what the meeting was about, his driver showed up, and he went on to the White House. It was only afterward that we learned the Secretary had been kept out of the loop on the invasion until it was well underway and he was called to the White House to be informed of it. There was something very sad about that moment.

Q: Was there a cadre of Vietnam hands, like yourself, who were pretty unhappy with what was going on there, or feeling that things were moving in the right direction?



TWINING: Well, you went to Vietnam just after I did. Your experiences may have been similar to mine. I went to Vietnam hostile to the war, hostile to Vietnam, realizing after about six months how complicated the situation was. By the time I left Vietnam at the end of 1968, I felt it wasn't a black or white kind of issue. It was a big gray area. You had awful things done by the communist side, and you had some pretty bad things done by the non-communist side, whether American or Vietnamese, in particular. I guess I left Vietnam, as did many of friends, with very mixed emotions about the war. I'm not sure how many of my friends really opposed it, and I'm not sure how many of us embraced it, either. We were somewhere in between. Some people, such as Tony Lake, stood up in opposition in March 1970 when the U.S. invaded Cambodia. There were a number of State Department people who signed a petition, putting their jobs on the line, saying that this was not right, that we should not have taken the war into Cambodia. Even then, my views were mixed because I could see from the military point of view why you wanted to stop the North Vietnamese who came down the Ho Chi Minh trail, through northeastern Cambodia. You wanted to get at them before they dispersed into Vietnam. But our action also threatened to bring small Cambodia into the war. I was not one of those who signed the petition, yet I respected those who did.

Q: So, you moved to the African Bureau when

TWINING: In mid-1970, I was assigned to my first desk officer job as desk officer for Ivory Coast, Upper Volta and Niger. I stayed there for two years. The Africa Bureau had developed a strong reputation by that time, and there was real competition for the desk jobs. My travel to all three countries in 1962 and assignment to Madagascar, plus ability to speak French helped me rejoin AF.

Q: What were our interests with those three posts?

TWINING: As with Madagascar, in those days, we still very strongly that we wanted to keep the Cold War out of Africa. We had an Assistant Secretary of State, when I became the desk officer, Ambassador David Newsom, who felt equally strongly: "Yes, we don't want to go to Africa to fight the Russians; we want to go to Africa for more positive reasons," in support of U.S. national interests, he told us. The Russians were making such a mess of themselves in Africa, anyway, that it was easier to let them stew in their own juices. So, our interests in the beginning of the 1970s did not focus on the Cold War. We were still fairly idealistic, focusing on how to support development, how to enhance stability while broadening the democratic base, as we worked, of course, to strengthen bilateral relations. Peace Corps was larger than ever. By that time, we had Peace Corps in all three of my countries. Along with our AID activity, this represented the general USG approach in those three countries.



Q: Well, let's take the Ivory Coast. Did you really feel that all three of these were France's problems, and we just wanted to keep a hand in, but not very obvious or very strong?

TWINING: No, while France obviously had a greater range of interests in its three ex-colonies, we also had our own interests and concerns, including the protection of American citizens. I realized when I was desk officer for a country like Niger that it was sometimes very hard to identify specific U.S. interests, except for these very broad areas that I just mentioned. Ivory Coast was different. Ivory Coast had an economy that was really marching along. It was a key cocoa and coffee supplier, one of the leading producers in the world. I remember once, Mr. Mars, the man who made M&Ms called me to discuss the cocoa market in Ivory Coast. Those things were important, and you accorded them priority. Ivory Coast was really in a case apart from either Upper Volta, as it was known at the time, or Niger. When you have large stretches of sand up in the Sahel region of Africa, it's not as easy to identify your specific interests, unless it is something like voting in the United Nations. In all three countries we had excellent, professional diplomatic representation: John Root in Ivory Coast, William Schauffele in Upper Volta, and Ross McClellan in Niger. Their leadership was important to me.

Q: Were the governments pretty stable in the three countries?

TWINING: The government was very stable in Ivory Coast. It was a one-party state in a country of considerable ethnic and religious diversity. As one looks at the chaos there today, you realize that President Felix Houphouet-Boigny was a very wise and enlightened leader. While keeping his hand firmly on the tiller, he drew out the best talent from the north, the south, and his home area in the center. The government had a lot of balance to it, something his successors failed to do. Niger was relatively stable, but the educated class had far fewer people. It was a country struggling to stay afloat, financially. It stayed afloat thanks to French subsidies, basically.

Then, there was Upper Volta, one of those countries which had already had a coup in 1966. One of the world's poorest countries, with the export of labor its main natural resource, it had a tradition of political and trade union activism. Moreover, Upper Volta, Burkina Faso today, borders six countries. We often worried that if there was too much instability in a place like Upper Volta, it could be contagious to the other countries of the area. As a result, we paid more attention to it than would normally be the case.

Q: Well, I'm just trying to think now. With these countries, did you feel yourself an Africanist, at this point? I mean, was there a discernible African specialty that one could say "Wear the sash of Africa on it?"



TWINING: Yes, I guess by that point I did. I had my Masters in African studies. I had had an African posting. I had also lived in Ouagadougou with Operation Crossroads Africa. Now, I was a desk officer, and the African Bureau of State had developed institutionally. It wasn't a handful of old guys, or just a few personnel, any longer. The younger hands were becoming were middle-aged. It was more of a bureau with a voice, a healthy development.

Q: Tell me about the office, your opportunity to travel, the difference between a desk and a posting in a country.

TWINING: The Office of West African Affairs was, and remains, the African Bureau's largest. I was fortunate at this learning stage of my life to have two strong Africanists as my bosses. The Director was O. Rudolph Aggrey, a career USIA officer with considerable service in Africa and whose father has been Ghana's most famous educator. His deputy was Harold Horan, also with African assignments under his belt. Both men gave us good policy direction and emphasized the need for us younger desk officers to give full support to our embassies in the field. We also spent considerable time liaising with the embassies of those countries in Washington. We worked hard, and our satisfaction in that office was real. Once I understood my responsibilities I had an orientation trip to the field in 1971 to visit my three countries and consult with the French in Paris, enhancing my own understanding and effectiveness as a result.

My experience on the desk convinced me that a desk officer is THE only person in government who knows or is supposed to know everything that the United States is doing in the country for which he or she is responsible. Thus, whether it is the National Science Foundation wishing to support a research project touching on your country, the Department of Commerce undertaking a trade initiative, or National Geographic Magazine intending to do a feature article on Ivory Coast, you as desk officer need to be on top of things so you can make a useful contribution or point out potential problems or demonstrate a conflict with U.S. policy. No one else in Washington will know the minutiae of the relationship that the desk officer does. When handling three countries, that was a lot to absorb, but it was a good challenge. In a posting to the field, on the other hand, you follow what is happening in your area of concern, e.g., the political or economic situation, and inform and analyze it for your ambassador and Washington, while you are living in a foreign land and learning what makes it tick, enhancing your knowledge and understanding. What you do overseas produces a product to be used by the government "consumer" in Washington.

Q: So, were talking about 1971?

TWINING: 1970 to 1972.



Q: So, then what happened?

TWINING: In 1972, I was assigned to Abidjan, Ivory Coast. It is the sort of thing that should happen in the Foreign Service but doesn't happen often enough, where either you do a country and then you do the desk for that country, or vice versa. It was easy for me to go to Ivory Coast, a country with which I already had familiarity and could fit right in. At the same time, I had just married my wife, Irene, and it was a good place for her to learn the Foreign Service life. Not only was there good living and safety in the capital city of Abidjan, but the place was developing rapidly. It had a modern hotel, with even an ice skating rink by the time we were about to leave. President Houphouet-Boigny had overseen the construction of an excellent road network all over the country. Every year he would hold the independence celebration in a different part of Ivory Coast. Government resources would pour into that area. I remember the celebration of August 1972 in Odienné, a dusty Sahelian town up in the remote northwestern corner of the country, next to Mali. The government put in resources to pave the streets and build a hotel, administrative buildings and a stadium. Water and electricity were expanded. It was a way to get development assets and services into an area. "An assignment" to Abidjan meant that if you were newly married, every weekend you and your spouse could take off for the west, or the east or the coast, or elsewhere up country, on good roads, stay in a lovely little hotel, and see the countryside in the area. It was a very good posting.

Q: Tell me a little bit about the background of your wife; how you met her, and her background.

TWINING: A friend with whom I had done African studies at SAIS said to me, at the beginning of the 1970s, "I know a person who went to Kent State University years ago, and she is now working at the White House. I would like you to meet her." She said, "I'll throw a little party, and is there a diplomatic couple we could invite?" I said, "Sure, there is the number two of the Ivory Coast Embassy and his wife, why don't you invite them." She said, "Great, why don't you pick up this girl and the Ivorian couple and come out to my house?" So, that was my wife's introduction not only to me but also to the Foreign Service, in a way. It got us together. It got my wife out of the White House, just before Watergate happened in mid-1972, good timing from her point of view.

Q: What did she think about the Nixon White House?



TWINING: She had worked on Capitol Hill before the Nixon White House. She enjoyed the glamour, but the hours were very long. She and I began going to White House parties together. I said, "Have you noticed what people talk about? They talk about not only what they do at the White House, but they're talking about all those bad guys out there." It was like they were circling the wagons. I remember saying to my wife, "That is not a healthy attitude. There is something wrong." It was just a month or two after I took my wife out of there that the Watergate break-in occurred. Somehow, it wasn't a complete surprise.

Q: You were in Ivory Coast from when to when now?

TWINING: We went out to Abidjan in mid-1972 and stayed until mid-1974. I was the political officer in the embassy. I supervised the consular section as well. It wasn't a tiny embassy like Tananarive, but was a medium-size post with the very good career ambassador I mentioned earlier, and the same Deputy Chief of Mission I had had in Madagascar, John Cunningham. It was always interesting. It was interesting as a political officer to see the positive and negative aspects of a one-party state. You saw what seemed positive efforts at economic development. People were getting wealthier, without question. Many people from neighboring countries were coming there to work because they could be richer than staying in Ghana or Upper Volta or Mali. Ivorians described their country as the "new Africa."

Yet you also worried about a one-party system which brooked no opposition. Ivorians closed up when you tried to pick their brains about whether they were able to have their voices heard. One of our concerns was the succession to Houphouet-Boigny, who was already old. There didn't seem to be a good succession mechanism lined up. In retrospect I called it right when I predicted it would be Finance Minister Bedie, but that was hardly the way it was supposed to work. It was closed, politically, which didn't make it that easy to work. At the same time, the Ivorians were nice, and they would invite you to their homes, and they would come to your home. Again, it was a lovely country, and yet there was something less than open in this one-party situation.

Q: In other words, if a political officer wants to go out and find out what the opposition was, I take it you couldn't?



TWINING: You weren't sure where the opposition was because it was virtually invisible. If anything, you would find there were regional differences. You would find there were differences of view within the party. There were generational differences. Those things, with time, you could start to put your fingers on. Did that amount to real opposition, per se? It amounted to trends, maybe. You could start pulling out trends from those differences. But, where was the opposition? There was a man in central west Ivory Coast, who used to write us letters a lot. I thought he was crazy. He went on and on, scribbling on and on. He is now the man who is president of Ivory Coast, Gbagbo. At the time, was he an opposition figure? I suppose. The word "opposition" didn't exist. He was, and yet his way of showing his opposition was by writing these strange letters to the American Embassy. It made you wonder about the quality of the opposition. So, it was just an interesting time in this one-party state, which, before and shortly after independence had crushed the opposition or, more often, absorbed it. President Houphouet-Boigny was determined to keep it that way. He did so until his death. Unfortunately, he held on for too long.

Q: In addition to your internal watch, what were some of the representative bilateral policy issues you raised with the government?

TWINING: This was a period during which the U.S. was lobbying very actively on the text of the Law of the Sea Treaty. We made a number of demarches to the Ivorian Government to seek its understanding or support. We arranged meetings for visiting American delegations. Issues such as Exclusive Economic Zones, deep seabed mining, the right of innocent passage, and the definition of territorial waters were all very important to the U.S. We probably placed somewhat greater importance on our discussions on Law of the Sea matters with Ivory Coast than with some other francophone countries in the region because of the Ivorian role as a regional leader and because there was more expertise in the government.

Indeed, we were quite active in working with the Ivorian Government on regional matters in general, both in seeking its views and in influencing it to weigh in with others in the region to defuse problems. Because of the centralized nature of the government, it was often the Ambassador who did this at a high level, particularly if we needed action taken, but the DCM and I did our share, as well. Ivory Coast was the leading member of the sub-regional Council of the Entente (with Upper Volta, Niger, Togo, Dahomey), and the Entente heads of state would meet or communicate regularly to compare notes. Ivory Coast was also an important member of the larger francophone African grouping and of the Organization of African Unity. Issues on which we would have compared notes with the Ivorians regularly included concerns over the direction Dahomey was taking after the 1972 military coup and instability in Upper Volta and Ghana.



Much of my time was spent in preparation for major international conferences in Abidjan. One was that of World Peace through Law, in 1974. This organization, headquartered in Washington, brought together jurists from around the world every four years at the highest levels to discuss legal issues. As the Embassy control officer, I was in constant contact with members and staff of the Ivorian Supreme Court for a year or more beforehand to help make arrangements. A massive U.S. delegation headed by just retired Chief Justice Earl Warren and Justice Thurgood Marshall participated in the conference. Another major undertaking requiring considerable advance planning and liaison work was for a meeting of the Interparliamentary Union. A large delegation of Senators (e.g., Strom Thurmond, Jacob Javits) and Congressmen, and their spouses descended on us for the meeting, mobilizing all personnel and assets of the Embassy. Note that, with its world class Hotel Ivoire, Abidjan was one of the brightest lights on the West African coast and attracted many visitors and hosted many meetings. That all meant work for the Embassy.

Q: What about the role of the French there?

TWINING: While the number of French citizens in country was the highest of any Francophone country at the time, I believe, actual French personnel within the government had dropped to relatively few. Frenchmen were still training the military and intelligence services, for example. On the other hand, there were many French "cooperants," working mostly as school teachers. France had, and continues to maintain, an intervention force battalion, just outside of Abidjan. The Ivorians were always very aware that it was there. France left it there in case there was a problem in another country, and it needed to dispatch troops. The rumor mill also had it that France wanted to ensure a stable Ivory Coast, where its political and economic interests were so great, at any cost, and would deploy its troops, if necessary. The French embassy was strong, and it had more of an "in" with the President and ministries, than did any other embassy. The President was certainly pro-French. It didn't become a competitive relationship between them and us, however. Because it wasn't an equal relationship, we didn't feel the need to compete.

Q: Although you were a political officer, I would think that once the French get in and have influence, they don't tolerate, if they can, any competition, particularly from the Americans. Is this the case there?



TWINING: Oh, yes. It was very much the case. I think it's the case anywhere the French had colonies, at that point of time. They still wanted to retain as much of a monopoly as they could. The French had major commercial interests in relatively rich Ivory Coast. They wanted to have it all and made it very tough for Americans to compete. Often, success for an American meant getting a French or Ivorian firm, or French-Ivorian, more likely the case, to represent the American company, rather than an American coming in and setting up shop himself. Sometimes the representation worked out well, sometimes not. To be an American investor, like Eveready batteries, took courage.

Q: Did the French need to live a sort of an extraterritorial existence?

TWINING: Many did. Not all. Some mixed well with Ivorians, partly because it was in their business or work interest to do so. There were also a number of French Ivorian couples, going back to their school days in France. Others didn't, mix well. I should also mention the importance of the Lebanese community. The authorities welcomed them; they could invest their money safely and reconvert it without problem. They could make use of the Lebanese business networks throughout West Africa. French-speaking, they could represent a French firm. Still, the French were most important. They had important interests, in cocoa, in the timber industry. They not only made money for themselves, they helped make money for Ivorians. It was not a totally negative situation.

Q: A lot of people from neighboring countries came in to work, didn't they?

TWINING: Yes. Perhaps as much as a quarter of the population was foreign: Malian, Voltaico, Nigerians, Nigeriano, Dahomeans, Ghanaians, Togolese, Liberians. They often performed menial labor jobs on the plantations and in the cities. Their remittances back home were important sources of income for their countries.

A wager was reportedly made at independence between Houphouet-Boigny and the more socialist-oriented Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana: "Let's see which one of us comes out on top, i.e., which system free market or socialism would be more successful over time." Indeed, when I was there 1972 to 1974, clearly Ivory Coast had come out on top. Ghana had gone through instability, coups. Ivory Coast had stability and growth. Ghanaians were coming to Ivory Coast to work, not vice versa. That was the reality. The Ghanaians looked at the Ivorians as people who liked to control, who liked to give orders without getting their hands dirty. The Ivorians, I think, looked at themselves as the people who were managers. That was the perception at the time.

Q: Besides the French, were other embassies particularly active in Abidjan?



TWINING: Note that President Houphouet-Boigny was so distrustful of communism that he would allow no embassies of communist countries to be established there. He saw any such embassies as elements of subversion, something Ivory Coast did not need. Indeed, I followed the fates of some Ivorian students who, unable to get scholarships to Western countries, ended up having to sneak out to attend Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow, or something similar. Not only were their degrees not recognized upon their return home, but they often brought back tales of racism or harsh living when they came back, hardly helpful to the communist cause. Through its Abidjan embassy operation, Taiwan made a major effort to keep the PRC out of Ivory Coast and worked through government authorities to seek to dissuade other members of the Council of the Entente from recognizing Beijing, either. The Taiwanese Embassy was very successful with Ivorian leaders during my time. Note that the South Koreans made a similar effort against North Korea through their Abidjan embassy, as well, acknowledging frankly that they were present for no other reason. Canada was quite active in Abidjan, motivated in particular by the need to show its Quebecois citizens that it was interested in the French-speaking countries of the world.

Q: After two years there, whither?

TWINING: An old East Asian hand named Jim Moran came through Abidjan, heading an inspection team. The State Department had just called for volunteers to study Cambodian, another Mon-Khmer language. I thought about how I liked those green rice fields in Asia and decided I wouldn't mind going back to Asia now. Jim Moran introduced a dose of reality, telling me, "Remember the guys who studied Mongolian years and years ago, and they never got there? Let me warn you, if you want to study Cambodian, be ready for the fact that you may not get there." I said something smart like, "Oh, I'll take my chances," and volunteered for Cambodian. I happened to be the only volunteer on earth.

Q: This is when?

TWINING: This was in 1974.

Q: Oh, yes. You weren't reading the tea leaves.

TWINING: I was far away in Abidjan. I confess, I didn't have all the information, but I thought I'd like to learn another Mon-Khmer language. It should be easier. If anything when you learn two languages of the same language family, you risk becoming more confused, I think, in all honesty. That is certainly what I discovered for myself.



Q: Absolutely.

TWINING: In any case, I left Abidjan in July 1974. I started studying Cambodian at FSI in August 1974. I took Cambodian until mid-June 1975. Meanwhile, Cambodia fell in April 1975. When Cambodia fell, I was studying the royal language. Like some other Asian languages, there is a certain vocabulary you use in speaking with kings and princes. I remember saying to myself, "Sihanouk is finished, why am I busting my head to learn this special language to use with Prince Sihanouk?" But, in any case, I stuck with Cambodian. The fellow I was to be replacing in Phnom Penh left with John Gunther Dean, our ambassador in 1975.

Q: Who was that?

TWINING: His name was Tim Carney. He was the political officer in Phnom Penh, and I was to replace him. So, there I was. Indeed, because we had Vietnam falling, we had Cambodia falling, and we also thought Laos was falling any minute, when I wasn't in language class, I stood watch in the Operations Center as part of the East Asia Bureau's task force in April 1975. I was on duty the night that President Ford made the decision to pull the plug and leave Saigon. I was on duty as we pulled the plug on Phnom Penh. I felt I was witnessing the end of an era.

Q: So, here you were, with the refugees coming out. What did they do with you?

TWINING: That's a good question. What were they going to do with me? Philip Habib, who was Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia, at the time, decided we needed to have someone in the field to watch over American interests in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. We needed someone in Bangkok, and we needed someone in Hong Kong. His deputy, Robert Miller, an old Vietnam hand, decided because I had been in Vietnam and still had a little Vietnamese, and had this other funny language that nobody knew, Koho, and because I had spent a year studying Cambodian, I would be the right one to send to Bangkok. So in June 1975, I was assigned to Bangkok to be what was called the Indochina watcher, Traveling there with my wife and two month old son, Daniel. Charles Lahiguere was assigned to the same position in Hong Kong.

Q: How did you fit into the Political Section in Bangkok? What were your duties?



TWINING: As my position was a new one in a new situation, Bangkok having become the world's largest U.S. mission following the fall of Saigon and Phnom Penh, I was placed in the large Political Section of the Embassy, the third ranking officer after the Section chief and his deputy. Washington's guidance was that I was to watch over everything dealing with any of the three countries of Indochina and, in particular, anything affecting specific U.S. interests. While I was in Political, where I was expected to report to Washington on political developments in those countries, my focus was also on economic-commercial issues, e.g., the fate of the assets of U.S. firms left behind in Saigon, consular issues, e.g., the welfare and whereabouts of American citizen particularly those in the POW/MIA category and those foreign nationals with ties to the U.S., and administrative, e.g., the fates of our chanceries and other USG properties in South Vietnam and Cambodia.

When I first arrived, we believed that our skeleton staff remaining in Vientiane, headed by Christian Chapman, was going to be expelled from there at any moment, the bulk of our people having left in May 1975. Thus, it was expected that in the course of my duties I would have to devote a fair amount of time to Laos. To this day, I praise the fact that wise heads on both the U.S. and Lao sides decided to maintain relations, thus avoiding the problems of reestablishment of relations such as we had with Vietnam and Cambodia, as well as allowing me to spend the great majority of my time focused on these other two countries.

I was fortunate in Bangkok to be working under very experienced Indochina hands, Ambassador Charles Whitehouse and Political Section Chiefs Thomas Barnes and successor Thomas Conlon. Their interest in the three countries and great knowledge of the area, helped define my duties, guide my activities and hone my analyses. Ambassador Whitehouse was one of the small group of Foreign Service Officers who had been assigned to all three countries of Indochina, a genuine asset for someone in my position. The Deputy Chief of Mission of that large Embassy was Edward Masters, a wonderful manager and mentor, succeeded by former Vietnam hand John Burke. Other supportive colleagues in the Political Section were Hervey Clark, Linda Stillman, David Reuther, David Sciacitano, Timothy Long, and Barry Broman. Because much of my work dealt with refugees, Consul General Margaret (Peggy) Barnhart and Refugee Chief Lionel Rosenblatt also gave important support. USIS officer Donald Rochlen, who had forgotten more about Vietnam than I ever knew, was invaluable. Outside the Embassy, a Catholic Relief Service employee previously in Cambodia, Warren Hoeffcker, helped me understand the realities of that country.



I spent a huge amount of time talking to refugees in camps from all three countries, trying to piece together what was happening and report it to Washington. I also sought the views of representatives of international organizations, NGO's and embassies posted in Hanoi or Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) and with any who had the slightest entrée into the reclusive Khmer Rouge regime inside Cambodia. Other countries like France and Canada also had Indochina watchers, with whom it was important to exchange information. A number of Bangkok journalists such as Denis Gray of AP and Alan Dawson of UPI had previously been based in one or more of the three countries, sometimes returning for visits (at least to Vietnam), and their insights were important.

Finally, as I was based in Thailand, it was very important to compare notes with Thai officials, particularly those in the Foreign and Interior Ministries. The Thai were extremely nervous in 1975-76 since, if there was anything to the domino theory, many were convinced that their turn was next. It was in our interest to share views and information and try to calm things and restore confidence, to the extent possible. Officials like Thep Thevakun and Nitya Pibulsonggram were excellent interlocutors in the Foreign Ministry, as was Displaced Persons chief Kamol Prachuabmoh at Interior.

Q: How did you deal with the issue of missing Americans?

TWINING: Together with two U.S. military personnel and our consular section, we were always on the watch for information. I went to the airport when lots of people arrived on the Air France flights from Saigon to ask about Americans who might still be there. I received, at one point at the airport, an American who had been under contract with CIA and had been left behind by the agency in Vietnam. The Vietnamese captured him, and he was in Son Tay prison up in the north for a long time. He escaped and for 29 days roamed the northern Vietnamese countryside, not having a clue where he was. Finally, he let himself be captured. He had terrible dysentery. They put him back in jail, then he was released at the end of 1975, beginning of 1976. His wife wrote us recently that he just passed away.

The POW/MIA issue was of particular concern. During my tour of duty we sought information from refugees and others regarding possible sightings of Americans or rumors of American prisoners in the three countries. We were never able to confirm that Americans were held prisoner except for a few civilians jailed just after the takeover in Vietnam, such as the individual, Arlo Gay, described above. My work also involved supporting the U.S. delegations coming through Bangkok on the POW/MIA issue, particularly that in 1975 of Congressmen Sonny Montgomery and Benjamin Gilman.

Q: What were some other examples of your work?



TWINING: There was a very wide variety of work. A U.S. moving firm was interested in knowing what happened to a Saigon warehouse full of the effects of USG personnel. We pulled out all the stops to inquire about Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Lao nationals who previously worked for the U.S. Were they safe? Executed? In Vietnam, at least, they turned out to be safe, even if they were forced into reeducation camps. When I visited Lao refugee camps, for example, I sought information on former Lao government officials with whom we had been associated and on the Lao royal family. (Refugees who had been in a reeducation camp with the latter told us the King had starved to death). I reported to Washington after talking to Vietnamese boat people located in camps in southern Thailand and hearing their stories of encountering pirates who killed, raped, and robbed, or of fishermen who treated them decently and gave them food and water. They also gave us useful information about the series of reeducation camps and new economic zones the Vietnamese authorities established after April 30, 1975. In February 1976 I traveled to Vientiane at the Department's request to see how our small Embassy staff was doing. I found a well motivated group of people working under our extremely able Chargé d'affaires, Thomas Corcoran, in very challenging conditions in a partially empty city. (Corcoran was the FSO who turned out the lights and locked the door when we closed our small Consulate in Hanoi in 1955, incidentally). It was one of those Foreign Service situations that cannot fail to impress you.

I spent half my time during my Bangkok assignment working on Cambodia, much of it along the Cambodian border, talking to Cambodian refugees who came out. What was happening inside Cambodia? At least, there was news coming out of Vientiane, news coming out of Hanoi. There were people working for international organizations in Hanoi, who would come and relax by the beaches down in Thailand. But there was no news coming out of Cambodia, except what refugees brought.

Q: While you were there, was the enormity of what was happening in Cambodia apparent at that point, or not?

TWINING: People always say, "Don't believe everything refugees tell you. They exaggerate in their own minds." That is good advice, in principle. Over and over, I would interview Cambodian refugees and hear terrible stories. At first, I thought to myself that I didn't believe it. How can all of this be happening, all the killing, all of this dying, no medicine for disease control, no willingness to have modern medicines? After a while, in late August 1975, the Department let the embassy know that it needed more information about what was happening in Cambodia than what I was producing. I decided that I had to compile my information more systematically if I was to be able to make any sense out of the incredible things I was being told. Where did this refugee come from? Where did that one come from? What was the person's background? Was he an intellectual, a farmer, or a fisherman? What experience did he have personally?



I started to piece things together from the refugee accounts, there being almost no other sources of information. What astonished me was that it all reminded me of the Holocaust, although this was 30 years later. How could this be happening in the world today? Yet, as I started compiling my information together, more and more methodically, the more I realized not only the enormity of it, but also the differences within Cambodia. Things were terrible in western Cambodia, especially in Battambang province. It just wasn't the same over in the east. Also, treatment of those evacuated from the cities (the "new people") was usually much harsher than of those who had been living in older Khmer Rouge areas (the "base people").

Q: Oh, yes. You were in Thailand from when to when?

TWINING: I went to Thailand in June 1975, and I left mid-1977.

Q: Well, were you involved in the long, drawn out efforts on the missing in action POW issue, there?

TWINING: Very much. As I noted, the Defense Department had two people stationed in the embassy in Bangkok to support that effort headed by Col. Paul Mather. My job was to support them, to interact with the Thai, to get Thai support for their effort. These were the early days, thus the importance of when Congressman Montgomery's delegation to Hanoi and Vientiane in late 1975, seeking Vietnamese and Lao authorization for our military to start working with those governments, to look for POWs, or MIAs. It was a time when a lot of people thought there were still prisoners of war in those countries. Anyone, whether State or the CIA, who had anything to do with those countries, first on your list was always to try to find what you could about any prisoners of war, or a case where remains might be found.

Q: Did you get involved in work of confidence men, people who were peddling bones and dog tags and pictures, and all that?

TWINING: Yes. I guess that is human nature. You found out there was a whole process of manufactured dog tags in Saigon, for example. People were trying to sell these things to Americans, as a way to get to the United States. "If you let me go as a refugee, I'll give you the information." The same with bones. You got involved in that. That is why you wanted your military experts there. They're the ones who had to sort out truth from fiction.

Q: Did you have much work with the NGOs, the Non-Governmental Organizations?



TWINING: Yes, you needed to keep contact with the NGOs, as well as the international organizations, because these people were working in refugee camps. The American Friends Service Committee was up in Laos. The International Committee of the Red Cross, UNHCR, and other private and international organizations often could give you insights into what was happening, at least in Vietnam and Laos. You never had insights into Cambodia because they couldn't get into Cambodia.

Q: Later, not now, in the 1980s, I talked with people who were dealing with the refugee situation. At that point, they thought there was almost an institutional bias to keep the refugees going, calling them economic refugees, and other things. These are real, honest to God refugees.

TWINING: You have all kinds of people, you really do. Where do they come from? You had a lot of Chinese showing up in Saigon, who said, "We're refugees, the communists are persecuting us." It may have been true, but it was equally true, I think, that there were people looking for a way to get to the U.S. to run businesses. You had a lot of that kind of thing. It took Solomonic judgment to distinguish who was legitimate and who was not.

Q: Of course, they had no great future in Vietnam.

TWINING: At least that is how it appeared in 1975-1977.

Q: They were entrepreneurs. When the North Vietnamese took over, being an entrepreneur is not exactly a good occupation to have in a communist regime.

TWINING: The North Vietnamese really hurt themselves in the first three years after they took over the South, in controlling things so much that business could not flourish. Employment was not created. Thank heavens, they finally woke up, and realized they had messed up a productive system, instead of trying to benefit from the system.

Q: I think this is probably a good place to stop. We'll pick this up next time. When did you leave Bangkok?

TWINING: 1977.

Q: Is there anything else you should mention?



TWINING: I was also in Thailand at the time that the Thai government asked the American troops to leave. I found myself, due to vacancies in the embassy, running the political section for a while. I accompanied Ambassador Whitehouse to meet with Thai Foreign Minister Pichit in mid-1976, in the midst of hostile demonstrations, indicative at the time of the genuine mood of nervousness. The Foreign Minister told me, "We have to ask the American troops to leave. We think there is no longer an advantage to having them here." Whitehouse earned my admiration when he left the Minister's office. I was standing next to him when he met the press. They asked, "Well, are you Americans leaving?" His answer was, "We do not stay where we are not wanted." I often thought, "Hats off to you." Whether he had instructions to say that, I don't know. But, I thought of Secretary Colin Powell recently when he was asked, "If the Iraqis ask you to leave, will you do it?" His answer was basically the same answer.

Q: So, we'll pick this up in 1977. Where did you go, so I can put it down?

TWINING: After two years in Thailand, I was really worn out, particularly through my non-stop involvement following the tragic situation in Cambodia.

Q: Has William Shawcross already written his book Sideshow about Cambodia?

TWINING: No, that was published in 1979. Certainly by the time I became reinvolved with Cambodia at the beginning of 1980, Sideshow had made an impact. Shawcross provided an interesting, historical insight, coasting much of the blame for the killing fields on Nixon and Kissinger. Whether accurate or not, the reality was that people were dying from lack of medicine, or overwork, or were getting killed, or starving to death. Whatever contributed to the rise of the Khmer Rouge years earlier was almost academic; what mattered during the Khmer Rouge regime was all the awful things that were happening. I preferred to focus on the latter.

Q: Okay, so we'll pick this up in your time at Cornell, in 1977.

TWINING: Okay.

Q: Today is the 23rd of June 2004. Where are we now? Is it 1976 or 1977?



TWINING: 1977. I had left Bangkok, where I had been Indochina watcher, in mid-year. I was on my way to Cornell University for a year of Southeast Asian studies at the graduate level. Before I arrived at Cornell, something else happened that I think is worth noting. Congressman Stephen Solarz, the Chairman of the House International Relations Committee's Subcommittee on Asia, was particularly interested in and horrified by, what had happened in Cambodia. When I arrived in Washington in mid-1977, he convened a special hearing of the subcommittee, to which I accompanied Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke. We testified on the current situation in Cambodia. Solarz' purpose was really to educate the American public about that appalling situation. Dick Holbrooke and I were along to help him do that. To this day, I credit Congressman Solarz for having been the one most responsible for attracting the attention of the United States to the Khmer Rouge atrocities. All three of us felt moral outrage about what was happening, and Congressman Solarz provided the perfect venue to present the facts to the world.

Q: On Cambodia, when you were testifying, were you being prompted, watched, controlled by the State Department, or could you tell it as you saw it?

TWINING: I could tell it completely as I saw it. That was the advantage of being a middle grade officer who had the full support of the Assistant Secretary of State, Holbrooke. Remember that this was in the post-Vietnam era when people in the United States didn't want to hear any more about Vietnam, Cambodia or Laos. But Holbrooke felt strongly that people needed to hear. Solarz felt strongly, too and was joined by a number of Congressmen who had similar concerns, and came to the hearing, and participated fully in it. It was no holds barred. An early problem in discussing Cambodia in 1977 was that it was still a closed society, a closed country. Our information was mainly from refugees; even radio intercept traffic was simply unavailable because the Khmer Rouge utilized radios very little. They used runners. It was really the victims themselves who provided us our information, and we analyzed and presented it, to the best of our ability. This is what the Foreign Service can do best.

Q: Did this get into the papers, and into the news?

TWINING: Yes, it did get into the papers, thankfully. It started getting people reacting more to, not just the stories coming out of Cambodia, but to refugee arrivals, the situation inside Vietnam, etc. It helped feed an academic debate. Remember, there were academics who went through the Vietnam War period bitterly opposed to the Vietnam conflict, and therefore, to the conflicts in Cambodia and Laos, as well, who were still around. If you came out and said the communists were doing terrible things in Cambodia, there were a number of people on the left who took issue with you. It engendered a healthy debate. Obviously, eventually the truth won out.



Q: How do you explain the rise of the Khmer Rouge?

TWINING: Did the bombing produce the Khmer Rouge? Did our actions spur on the whole rebel movement in Cambodia? That is a fair question, to which the answer is probably, in part, yes. Our bombing did account for many civilian casualties and created popular bitterness. I always felt that as important, and maybe more important, was Prince Sihanouk's call from Beijing after he was deposed in 1970, for all Cambodians to come out and support the monarchy, against the Americans and their lackey the Lon Nol regime. A lot of people, including the present Prime Minister of Cambodia, Hun Sen, joined the Khmer Rouge because of the Prince's appeal. The Khmer Rouge got started after a revolt of peasants who protested that they weren't getting a decent price for their rice, back in 1967. Cambodian pseudo-intellectuals, who had failed or often barely passed their studies in Paris, took hold of this peasant revolt and made it into a movement. All of this aided and abetted the growth of the Khmer Rouge.

Q: Well, then, did you feel that you would never see Cambodia again; or maybe views from the border were all we were going to get?

TWINING: Well, personally I felt that I would never get to see Cambodia. I had never even been to Cambodia. I had done my Indochina watching, Cambodia watching, from the Thai border. I felt the emotions about that appalling situation that any human being would feel. At the same time, I believed that I was probably moving on to other things because I assumed that the Khmer Rouge were in for a long time. I was pleasantly surprised to find that wasn't the case. Some strange things happened even during the Khmer Rouge period in Cambodia. Jets had flown over northern Cambodia and dropped some bombs. People were accusing us of being behind it in 1976 or 1977. But this was a time when we just weren't doing any of those things. This kind of incident made you realize there was opposition coming from somewhere. Those jets, I assume in hindsight, were Vietnamese, since the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia at the end of 1978, and incidents occurred between those two throughout the Khmer Rouge period. But in 1977, in a closed country, you had the feeling that it was going to remain that way for a long time.

Q: Then you went to Cornell for a year? How does such an assignment come up for a Foreign Service Officer?

TWINING: I went to Cornell for a year. I had had two Southeast Asian assignments, but I didn't feel I had any academic underpinning of my knowledge of Southeast Asia. It was a wonderful thing. The State Department, in those years, had the money to send one person to Cornell every year for graduate studies on Southeast Asia. All of us who did a year in Cornell benefited from it, truly.



Q: How did you find the studies, and also the faculty? At one time, we discussed before, the faculty had been a force, almost unto itself. Indonesian policy was very much opposed to us. I don't know very much about Indochina, but I assume that they would have been opposed to whatever we were doing there. But, this is another time. What had happened by the time you got this?

TWINING: You're very observant because, again, some of the left in the United States still felt the communists in Cambodia, like in Vietnam, could do no harm. That was true for some of the faculty at a place like Cornell. Cornell has a wonderful Southeast Asian program. It reflected, I think, some of the feeling of the American left at that time, which was natural. It wasn't just the professors; I would say that many of the students who worked on Southeast Asia shared those same views. They were anti-war views, which continued two years after the war. I found myself sometimes being looked at as the enemy by some of the students, in particular. I represented the evil government. That went away over time. My relations with most people were fine.

Cornell had some outstanding faculty members; George Kahin comes to mind. He was one of the leading academics on Southeast Asia in the United States. He was hostile to U.S. policy in Indonesia, and to the dictators who ran Indonesia. He had similar feelings about Vietnam. Yet, as a human being, he was a very warm, congenial person, and someone you enjoyed studying with.

Q: Did you concentrate on any particular area?

TWINING: I really tried to get a broad, academic knowledge of "Southeast" Asia. That extended from Papua New Guinea all the way through northern Laos, for example. It was an ideal time to study the ancient history of the area, its ethnic composition, its literature. It also gave me the time to audit Carl Sagan's astronomy course, and Cornell's basic course on the social dynamics of rural irrigation. How do people share the water when there is only so much water? There were lots of benefits that came out of that sabbatical year.



Note that one took a full schedule of courses, did papers, and took exams. Your satisfactory completion of normal requirements is what the State Department expected from its investment in your education. There was no thesis. While it was unfortunate that a year was not enough to get a formal degree, by far more important was that you had what is tantamount to a sabbatical to get away from the daily press of work and, through reading up on a wide variety of related subjects (I spent many hours in the basement of Olin Library reading old French documents on Indochina, for example) and writing about them, as well as listening to experts address subjects of which you had only a superficial knowledge to date, your own thinking and understanding about the area developed dramatically. As I reflect back on this period 1977-78, I consider it to have been invaluable, enhancing my knowledge and understanding and making me a more effective observer of the international scene and representative of the U.S. It is an experience I wish every Foreign Service Officer could have during his or her career.

Q: Did the subject of the role of, or the foreseeable role of mainland China come up, when you were doing this? Is this something that was looming off in the horizon?

TWINING: Of course. It was a time of change. While I was in Bangkok, I was one of those authorized to go to Mao Zedong's, and Zhou En-lai's memorial ceremonies at the Chinese Embassy. By the time I got to Cornell, China was changing. It was clear. It was fascinating to try to figure out where it was going. Where was it going with resurrecting Deng Xiaoping, for example? So, you couldn't help but get exposed to those currents at Cornell with the Southeast Asia program's series of lectures. Lectures could be on Southeast Asia. They may be on Asia, in general. That kind of thing really turns you on to all the dynamics of the Asia region.

Q: When you got out of there, whither?

TWINING: Coming out of there, I was all set to take a job in the State Department dealing with, I thought, Southeast Asia. I found none was available. I became the desk officer, the deputy office director for Australia/New Zealand in the East Asian bureau, still under Assistant Secretary Holbrooke. That was a good two years.

Q: From when to when?



TWINING: 1978 to 1980. It was an interesting period of time. It not only gave me the chance to work on two countries that had very important alliances with the United States, but it also gave me a bit of a backseat to continue to look at Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos. It gave me a chance to offer advice, for instance following Vietnam's overthrow of the Khmer Rouge regime. What was striking about working on Australia in those days was just how intense the relationship is in so many different areas. You would go from following scientific exchanges to intelligence exchanges. You would deal with trade questions. The Australians would become very tough when it came to issues involving entry of their lamb into the United States, or sales of Australian wheat, for example. They were hard negotiators. It kept you on your toes, and increased your understanding of your own national interests. New Zealand was a bit less forceful. In those days, before the strains developed in our relationship in 1985 with the banning of U.S. nuclear powered war ships from New Zealand ports, that alliance was also very strong. Indeed, then as now, we could not do so much in Antarctica within New Zealand's support and assistance.

Q: What about multilateral issues?

TWINING: Our consultations with both countries on major developments in the world, particularly in Asia, were constantly ongoing and intensive. Remember that, with Australia, we were just emerging from the dip in the relationship from the early 1970s with Prime Minister Gough Whitlam's opposition to the war in Vietnam. With Malcolm Fraser as Prime Minister, our consultations regained the intensity they had had during the 1960s. With the Muldoon government in New Zealand, we also saw eye-to-eye politically. Thus, it was normal that we consulted closely with both on developments such as the evolution of the situation in China, the Chinese-Vietnamese relationship, and events in the countries of Indochina and in Indonesia. I have to note that both Australia and New Zealand kept top flight diplomats in Washington who did not miss a trick. From the point of view of status, we had two politically well connected envoys in Canberra and Wellington, Philip Alston and Anne Martindell, respectively. During my time, I believe there is nothing we did that caught our two allies unaware. Both governments wanted to see us move ahead to a more realistic position of that relationship in 1979.

Q: How did we see the New Zealand government at the time? Was it one that was more conservative, and less labor oriented? I'm using labor in the British term.

TWINING: Absolutely. You're exactly right. The Muldoon government was a conservative government. Although it kept tariffs high, which we felt was self-defeating, it was very easy to work with the Muldoon Government, politically. With both Australia and New Zealand, then and now, we have so many common interests that regardless of who runs the government, we can always find ways to work together.



Q: How did you deal with issues like lamb, or wool or wheat? Were these bilateral or multilateral issues?

TWINING: The main contentious issues were primarily bilateral in nature. They centered around access to our market with their often cheaper products, and sometimes vice versa, and that of our agricultural subsidies, which they felt gave us an unfair advantage in the world market. What we tried to do was to get our experts together, to talk to one another and see if we could work things out. Aviation negotiations were another area that with both Australia and New Zealand were very tough. They had their interests and we had ours. It was always important to get the experts together and keep in mind our overall relationship.

Q: What about the outer possessions, the islands and all, of both these countries? Were these of interest to us?

TWINING: Yes, we compared notes a great deal on the South Pacific, where Australia and New Zealand were far better informed than we. I suppose what was of most interest to us was Papua New Guinea. The Australians had controlled Papua New Guinea, almost up until that time. Papua New Guinea is the largest of the South Pacific island nations. No one knew whether a country with a third to a quarter of the world's languages, rugged topography, and a reputation for violence, could hold together as a nation.

Q: Were the Australians making news about East Timor then?

TWINING: East Timor had basically come and gone as an issue, by that time. Indonesia invaded Timor in 1974-75. By 1978, 1979, 1980, East Timor had really gone down on everyone's radar screen.

Q: What about our joint monitoring facilities? We had a lot of these things in the outback, I guess, of Australia. Was this a point of friction at all, particularly with the newspapers, the left, of Australia?

TWINING: Some of the newspapers on the Australian left were always trying to create controversy over shared facilities, in particular that at Alice Springs, Australia. The Australians and we tried to coordinate, very carefully, how we would handle such controversies with the media. Our coordination was good. So, while some journalists might do their mudslinging about whether the U.S. was putting Australia in danger with these facilities, we both found common interest in supporting them. We were both able to manage the public affairs aspects.



Q: Did the Australians sort of have a special "in" with our government? Were they able to get things done, Congressional contacts, or anything like that?

TWINING: The Australians and the New Zealanders were very good diplomats. They were very good both with the Congress and with the administration. The good feeling extending from World War II had not disappeared. An Australian foreign minister wanting to see the Secretary of State had no trouble whatsoever seeing him or talking with him on the phone. The atmosphere among our three governments was very good.

Q: Well, you left in 1980. Was this because of most assignments were two years?

TWINING: Right. This was the regular rotational assignment. Before we move on, I would like to mention two Indochina-related developments which affected me. First, in November 1977, I was called back to Washington in connection with possible testimony in an espionage trial. A USIA officer named Humphrey, desperate to get his Vietnamese family out of Vietnam, was accused of pulling off the wire my reporting cables, plus any others that he thought would be of interest and passing them to the Vietnamese.

Q: These were from Bangkok?

TWINING: These were from Bangkok. The FBI caught him, I suppose, just after I left Bangkok. We estimate that as many as one-half of my reports that I had written on Vietnam, citing travelers coming out of Vietnam, international organization and foreign embassy representatives who lived there, and so forth. Working under instructions from a Hanoi agent in the U.S., Humphrey was taking the cables and giving them to a Vietnamese woman at Dulles Airport. She would then take them to Paris and give them to the Vietnamese embassy. What Hanoi did not know at the time was that she was a double agent who was working for the FBI. Both the Hanoi agent and the USIA man were found guilty. I ended up not having to testify because the prosecutors at the Alexandria courthouse had made a strong case. Nevertheless, it impacted on me because the State Department, probably wisely, contacted any sources I named specifically. For example, a Burmese source who worked for an international organization was told, "We want you to know that you have been compromised in your conversations with Charles Twining." State would show him what I had written, which it believed Hanoi had seen. It made me very uncomfortable. The Burmese, for example, let me know how disappointed he was, and that he would never talk to me again. Another person, a Swedish diplomat, let me know that he was flattered that I recorded every single word he told me with great accuracy. He commended me for my reporting skills.



This incident taught me a lesson that I have kept in mind through the rest of my career: only cite someone by name in your reporting if it really makes a difference. It is just as easy to say, "A senior military officer in Country X, as to say Colonel so and so in Country X." That was a learning experience for me.

Q: What was the second development that occurred?

TWINING: In the aftermath of the Vietnamese takeover of Cambodia in early 1979, the subsequent flight of the Khmer Rouge together with many captive people in the population toward the Thai border, and the mass hunger that occurred among the Cambodian population in the country's very unsettled situation, many Cambodians either fled into Thailand or came there temporarily seeking food as starvation became widespread in the latter part of 1979-early 1980. All of us within the U.S. Government who spoke Khmer (Cambodian) were sent on temporary duty to Thailand to monitor the food and overall refugee situation for the Embassy in Bangkok, sounding the alarm when there were unmet needs. Despite having by then two young children at home, I agreed to Assistant Secretary Holbrooke's request and traveled to Bangkok on New Year's Day in 1980. I first met up with Michigan Senator Carl Levin with the intention to accompany him into Phnom Penh, where he planned to talk to the new authorities there about the overall situation, with me as interpreter. Those authorities (read: Vietnamese) refused to grant us visas, so we spent a week traveling along the Thai-Cambodian border, instead. Afterward, I was three months along the border, primarily based in the town of Aranyaprathet, to monitor and report on the food and refugee situations. Other USG employees with me included FSO Robert Porter, my former Khmer teacher at FSI Sos Kem, and two VOA employees Lapresse Sieng and Yann Ker, backstopped by old hands in Bangkok Tim Carney, Desaix Anderson, Michael Eiland, and Lionel Rosenblatt. Ambassador Mort Abramowitz and his dynamic wife Sheppie took particular interest in what we were doing and supported us in every way.

Q: What was the situation when you were there?



TWINING: Although still relatively chaotic, the situation had improved along the border during the January-April 1980 period. By that time there was widespread UN and NGO involvement, much of it paid for by the United States Government, to address both food and medical needs. Large refugee camps were established, with Thai agreement (sometimes begrudgingly), at places like Khao I Dang, Nong Chan, and Sa Keo, containing an estimated 150,000 persons at that time, with smaller refugee settlements occurring in a number of villages north and south of Aranyaprathet along either side of the border. Some were under firm Khmer Rouge control. We took the position, as did most of those working along the border, that people were people, regardless of who controlled them, and if they were hungry, they should be fed. We encountered cases of people desperate to get out from under the Khmer Rouge and, whenever possible, we pressed the authorities to allow them to move to a non-Khmer Rouge controlled location. One of the achievements of that period was the establishment of a "land bridge" at the border settlement of Nong Chan, where ox carts came by the hundreds to pick up food from the UN and take it back into Cambodia. Note that this was also a period when resistance groups were organizing along, and even inside, the border. One such location I visited to monitor the food situation was a place called Sok Sann, high up a mountain about 3 kilometers inside southwestern Cambodia, led by a wonderful elderly patriot named Son Sann, who was later to play an important role in the Cambodian peace settlement. The U.S. role in helping meet the humanitarian needs of the Cambodians in the late 1979-early 1980 period was critical, and I felt a measure of satisfaction in having played my small part.

Q: Well, in 1980, whither?

TWINING: In 1980, I took a change in my career path. I went to work in Personnel for two years, first as deputy, then as director of the office responsible for filling all positions in the East Asian Bureau, both at home and overseas, as well as those in the Economic Bureau at the State Department. It was an interesting job. I tell every young Foreign Service officer, in fact, whoever complains about personnel, "Why don't you take your turn in Personnel?" Suddenly, we are the "enemy". We are the ones making the decisions about personnel cases.

Q: How did the Personnel system work?

TWINING: At that time State's Foreign Service personnel system was divided into two parts. One half acted as intermediaries with, and representatives of, the Department's geographic and functional bureaus, the other as counselors to, and representatives of, the employees. While my office for the East Asian and the Economic Bureaus took care of assignments for Foreign Service personnel of all levels but the highest, the counselors were divided by level of personnel and area of specialization. We met in "panel" meetings, where individual assignments would be discussed, differences thrashed out, and agreement reached.



As an example, a communicator who wanted to go to Singapore or Bangkok when the most pressing service need at his or her level might be Niamey would be the subject of debate between those representing the bureaus and the person representing the communicator. The communicator's counselor would present the candidate's reasons for wanting Singapore (e.g., good for his career, appropriate schooling for his children), whereas the African Bureau person would observe that the post had only one communicator who had suddenly left with severe amoebic dysentery, and the post was desperate for a replacement. The communicator would sometimes have talked to the East Asia Bureau and/or me about getting the Singapore assignment, and if we were convinced of the merits, I, too, would jump into the discussion. It was a lively time. Critics sometimes called the system inefficient, but rather than a purely arbitrary and unfeeling assignment operation or one of chaos where employees all wanted to go to Europe and nowhere else, one would try to work out a good balance between Department needs and employee wishes. At times management would overrule a panel decision, but in most cases our decisions held.

It was an interesting time to do Personnel because in 1980, China was opening up. We were expanding our presence there. It was tough living in China, in those days. We were opening up consulates in difficult places. Beijing itself was still tough. I had to persuade people not only to take on a China assignment; I had to persuade them to precede it with two years of Mandarin or Cantonese language training. That wasn't everyone's cup of tea, but anyone we assigned to China, even someone on the lowest ranks of the administrative side, we tried to persuade to take a couple months of Mandarin, if they weren't going to take two years. It was a challenge to fill difficult places. China was one. There was a post in the central Philippines, Cebu, where you had to ask an officer to learn a language, Visayan, that you wouldn't use anywhere else in the world. The assignment helped me to learn how the State Department worked. That was from 1980 to 1982.

Q: Did you get any feel for a core China hand? With the Soviet Union, you had people who would do anything, go anywhere, in order to speak Russian. They would go under very difficult circumstances. But you are telling me, by this time, there was not a perceived willingness within the ranks to do anything to be a China-speaking hand.



TWINING: You know, you had to establish that tradition that the Russian speakers had had for some time. Remember that it was only with Nixon's visit in 1972 that we even started having any relationship with the Chinese, that it was only toward the latter part of the Carter administration that Deng Xiaoping visited Washington (January, 1979). I was in Personnel just after both sides agreed to expand diplomatic representation. There wasn't a very large coterie of China hands. You had to use persuasion to try to get people to take China assignments. In all honesty, people who had done China assignments already would sometimes come back and say what a tough place it was to work and live, and declare that they would never go back again. Others would return and declare their intention to remain China specialists. We worked to build up a cadre of China hands.

Q: There was a feeling in Personnel that this was really something you had to work at. You couldn't relax and let gravity take its course.

TWINING: For a place like China or Laos, say post-1975, gravity just didn't take its course. You had to recruit people, talk people into trying something like those posts. I had the opportunity to travel with the Director General of the Foreign Service, Ambassador Joan Clark, to China and Japan in early 1982, greatly enhancing my understanding of the problems and possibilities our personnel in these countries had.

Q: What about Laos? Was there an ambassador or chargé<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> there, during your time?

TWINING: No. From 1975 until 1990 or 1991, when I was office director for Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, maybe 1990, 1991, we had only a chargé<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>. The person had the full rank of chief of mission, but at the same time had only the title of Chargé<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> d'Affaires. We kept that lower title deliberately because the various U.S. administrations really didn't want to recognize the regime in place by making our envoy an ambassador. In the Embassy in Vientiane, there was only a handful of people all through those years.

Q: During this time when you were in Personnel, was there any effort to maintain a Vietnamese core group? With China, for example, we kept people on the periphery. It's a big country, of course. But we had a fairly solid group of China officers working in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Burma, and Thailand. Vietnam was a bit smaller, but we had trained a lot of people in this language. Were we keeping them on hold, or were we able to do anything on that?



TWINING: That's an excellent question. The old Vietnam hands, of which I am one, were not particularly keen to get reinvolved in the area, unless they were in the geographic office at the State Department. They started losing their Vietnamese language skills. The Department had one advantage, though. We needed Foreign Service officers who had sufficient Vietnamese to interview those Vietnamese seeking to come to the U.S. as refugees. Sometimes we recruited our consular personnel for language training, them, and sometimes there were volunteers. We started to build up a core of Vietnamese speakers among younger officers that we hoped would continue and grow until such time as we had real relations with Vietnam. It meant that we never really discontinued our Vietnamese language program at FSI, thank heavens.

Q: Was Japanese study sort of a world onto itself at FSI?

TWINING: Japanese study is always a world apart, absolutely. The Japan hands are a very tight-knit group.

Q: The Chrysanthemum Club.

TWINING: Our Japan hands constitute the Chrysanthemum Club. I'm told today that there is less of a Chrysanthemum Club than before. The relationship has grown between our two countries, and there are many more people who come and go. In those days, and until very recently, there were more people who wanted to do assignments in Japan, willing to do two years of language study, than there were positions available. You didn't have to go and recruit. The question would be one of choosing between two qualified people. Our Japan hands would do successive tours of duty in Japan or alternate a tour in Japan with the desk in Washington, or an assignment in the Economic Bureau, working on Japan. Japan has never been difficult to fill with appropriately qualified people.

Q: What about Korea?

TWINING: Korea is somewhere in between. Korean is an awfully tough language. For Chinese - both Mandarin and Cantonese as well as Korean and Japanese, in the days when I was in Personnel, we wouldn't take anyone over the age of 40 to learn the languages. Linguists had concluded that the ability to learn those really hard languages just started to deteriorate very quickly after age 40.

Q: You're really supposed to start before puberty.

TWINING: That's right.



Q: But that's a little hard.

TWINING: That's a little hard to do, but if you have someone who wanted to study Chinese or Korean or Japanese, you wanted them to begin when they were in their late twenties or thirties, and not later than that. There were advantages for people who wanted to go and serve in Korea. You had the use of the PX, and that kind of thing. The living was not uncomfortable. Japan had more of the golden aura. We didn't have great difficulty in filling the posts.

Q: How about staffing the Pacific islands?

TWINING: Well, to be honest, in those days we did not have very much in the Pacific islands. When I was in personnel, we had Saipan in the northern Marianas. I visited some of the other islands in the then Trust Territories, and eventually we opened three mini-embassies and closed Saipan. We also had Suva, Fiji, Port Moresby, and Papua New Guinea. That was basically it, so you're talking about very, very small personnel needs.

Q: At the level you were dealing with, you didn't have to deal with political appointees trying to get in or favorites, or were there?

TWINING: You don't have to worry about the political appointees, in most cases. When they get in, they want to get in as ambassadors, and that is a White House matter. All you do is accept it. Once in a while, you might find a political appointee who wants to come in the back door, into the Foreign Service. Then, we do get involved. Even though the decision ended up being that of the Director General or higher, you had to keep your eyes open because that kind of thing did happen.

Q: I had my time in personnel, and you basically dine on it for the rest of your career, people explaining how the system works. It is essentially a relatively fair system. But, one of the things is you can sort of help get your next assignment. Where did you go after that?

TWINING: While I was in personnel, because I had been desk officer for Australia, I was lined up to go to Perth, Australia, as consul general. On my one visit there as desk officer, I found it to be one of the most beautiful places I had ever seen on earth. So, my wife and two sons were happy about going to Australia. I thought that was where I would be moving onto in 1982; then something happened.



Things happen in the Foreign Service in one's career. I received a phone call from the Africa Bureau, from Deputy Assistant Secretary [DAS] Jim Bishop. He said, "Charlie, we need you." I said, "What for?" He told me the story of Cotonou, Benin. He said, "We badly need someone to go to Cotonou. The Reagan administration wants to close the post." In late 1981, two of our embassy people had been fired upon by the military. Benin, formerly Dahomey, had a revolutionary regime that didn't like Americans or the West. The Reagan White House told State that it was time to get out of there and close the Embassy. Dr. Chester Crocker, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, proposed to the White House the following: "Give me six months to send someone out to Cotonou, and if he or she after six months wants to close it, we will close. If, on the other hand, that person recommends that we stay open, then I want to stay open." As a result, Jim Bishop asked if I would be that person to go out for six months, as the Permanent Chargé d'Affaires. We hadn't had an ambassador there since 1977, when we had a bad diplomatic incident, and pulled out the ambassador. After that, we had permanent Chargés. So, in mid-1982, I gave up going to Perth, much to my wife's chagrin. My wife, boys and I went to Cotonou in 1982. It was an interesting experience. I had never been posted to a revolutionary regime before.

Every morning, the radio would wake you up by broadcasting the Communist "Internationale". Beneath the revolutionary veneer, Benin was very West African, with friendly people. It wasn't their fault that they were under a tough revolutionary government. I learned something that stood me in good stead: revolutions run their course. Benin adopted Marxism-Leninism in 1975; its revolution had been going on for seven years. The revolution was running out of steam. The country had gotten poorer. Cotonou, in the old days, was a vibrant city with one of the best educated populations in West Africa. By the time I arrived, there was no longer a bookstore to be found. If you found any publications to buy, they were communist propaganda. That was it. The educated Beninese had left the country or were lying low. The government was in the hands of a colonel, who was president, and a bunch of young military officers, or radical civilians, who didn't have much feel for what they were doing.

The other thing I discovered is that these embassy people who had been fired upon in November 1981 had been partying and had turned stupidly, if mistakenly, into a military camp at dusk. The military couldn't figure out who these foreigners were. Cotonou had been attacked by mercenaries in 1977, creating a paranoia and a hunt for enemy secret agents that had not abated. Soldiers panicked and fired on our people. No one ever told Washington was it was our fault to begin with. If these people hadn't been drinking and had watched where they were going, they wouldn't have turned into a military camp. It was verboten; we all knew that. We couldn't go into that military camp. So, with the revolution getting tired out and the population increasingly poor and unhappy, plus my realization that the problem with this incident was, at least in part, ours, led me to recommend after six months that we keep the embassy open.



Q: When you went there, could you sit down and talk frankly with someone in the ruling circle at all?

TWINING: I tried. Absolutely. What you do as a diplomat is you always try and make contacts. I realized how badly we needed more contacts with people. My predecessors weren't able to have the contacts because the officials weren't open to their contact. By the time I got there, people were starting to open up a little, at least to have exchanges of views. Whether it was the foreign minister or high-ranking official who, until just before I arrived, had been serving as the radical gatekeeper to the President's office, there were people with whom it was possible to have frank conversations. As time went on, their number increased.

A hint of things to come occurred when I arrived in Cotonou in mid-1982, and the President named a young, dynamic official from his village as Director of the Americas Department at the Foreign Ministry. The official, Georges Timanty, assured me that President Kerekou was sincere in wanting to improve ties with the U.S. and asked him to work toward this end. We agreed to cooperate. It was certainly worth a try. Besides his becoming a very good friend, he was also an excellent channel through whom to transmit messages. Timanty and I sought areas where our two countries had common interests, whether it be at the UN or in developing Benin, and worked to increase our cooperation. With time, things started to improve, but again, I was fortunate to have arrived when the revolution was "tired", and authorities realized they had to start opening up again to the outside world.

Q: Were you able to make the point to anyone that you are on a watching brief, deciding on whether to stay open. If we pull out, there will be consequences, not nasty ones, but lack of opportunity for development, or for being part of the "civilized world."

TWINING: Absolutely. There were ways you could pass that message to people with whom you had particular contact, such as this young man from the Foreign Ministry, who I am sure passed it much higher up. You did it in a way that was not threatening, or confrontational. I think that helped, absolutely.

Q: Could you locate Benin for me, and talk about the relations with its neighbors?



TWINING: Benin is a sliver of a country, next to Togo. In those days, Togo was the liberal, wide-open place where we all went to to buy our groceries. Little being available in Cotonou. Togo was headed by a military officer, President Eyadema, who needed to keep decent relations with President Kerekou, the Colonel (later General) who ran Benin. But, at the same time, Eyadema was very critical of the radicalism that he found in Benin. On the other side of Benin was giant Nigeria. If you have ever served in the neighborhood of Nigeria, you know that when that giant sneezes, you shake, because its economy, its politics, always impacted on its neighboring states, including Benin. At one point the Nigerian Government decided to expel illegal immigrants, and I suddenly had 200,000 people camped on the beach in front of my residence. We authorized \$25,000 in emergency assistance for them, to be distributed through Benin's Red Cross, a good gesture.

Thomas Pickering was Ambassador in Lagos during my year in Cotonou, and I would go over and seek his advice. He was a terrifically experienced diplomat and very helpful to me. North of Benin, then you had the Sahel states of Niger and Upper Volta, countries that were the poor relatives, I suppose, of the neighborhood. Benin was the only revolutionary state among them all and stood out like a sore thumb. Benin was the object of suspicion by all the neighboring states.

Q: Where did the revolutionary spirit come from? Was it the French left, or from Moscow, or was it really homegrown?

TWINING: I think that President Kerekou and the group of young, fellow officers who together waged their coup d'etat in 1972 were looking for a magic bullet that would result in rapid economic development; this after a round of musical chairs among civilians to be president was getting the country nowhere. The coup opened the door to radicals and communist country representatives to come into Benin.

The Libyans became important and poured money into places that they thought would do their bidding. They had a huge Embassy in Cotonou and were giving aid, often through the formation of joint state corporations. Libya's influence was very important on these young military officers. The other important player was the Soviet Union. The Soviets had a large embassy. They were also giving aid and teaching the Marxist philosophy. They lost no time in trying to make sure that Benin's military officers knew what Marxism was, even if they may not have understood it. You had officers who were basically revolting against the right. So, where did they turn for their examples and their support? They turned to Moscow and they turned to Tripoli.

Q: Did Cuba play any role there?



TWINING: Cuba played a bit of a role, but it wasn't an important role. As I recall, Cuba had some doctors, but it wasn't a major role, at least not in my time. Cuba was too busy in Angola.

Q: Did you sort of cast a role in Benin as being a coward force to the communists, or was it part of the Cold War?

TWINING: I mentioned earlier that what I liked about the 1960s and early 1970s is that we tried very hard not to play Cold War games in Africa. Africa had much more important problems that needed attention. We didn't need to export our problems with Moscow into Africa. That changed. The rivalries we knew elsewhere also eventually took place in Africa. I saw no point, personally, in trying to make this a Cold War kind of confirmation in Benin. I think if I tried, I probably wouldn't have gotten anywhere with it. I thought it was more important to talk about the concrete problems they had, or problems we had, or misunderstandings of one side or the other, rather than to use it as a place to fight communism. The Soviet Ambassador was Dean of with the diplomatic corps. I had a very tiny embassy. In any case, I don't think I would have gotten very far playing Cold War games in a place that, with the revolution running out of steam, may not have been even interested in such.

Q: How did you wife and family, being deprived of Perth, for God's sakes, do there? It didn't sound like a very hospitable area.

TWINING: My wife and my two sons were not very happy the first three months we were there. The only school was a French school, and they didn't know a word of French when we arrived. My wife found it so hard to get groceries unless we went to Togo, that she said, "Why are we going through this?" After three months, my kids loved it. There was a beautiful beach to go swimming. The Beninese people were nice. In three months, my sons' French was beautiful. They did well in the French school. There was a Sheraton Hotel to visit and eat delicacies like bush rat paté. We had a beautiful house of our own, a beautiful swimming pool. A downside was health. Both our sons had malaria while we were there. The temperature of one of my sons went up to 106 degrees, which scared us all. It was at a time when State's medical officer claimed that there were no aralen resistant strains of malaria in West Africa, suggesting they must not be taking their aralen or it must be the flu. Finally, the doctor of a Norwegian oil company working off the coast of Benin said, "My God, this is malaria," and started treating aggressively both boys, especially the one with the 106-degree temperature, and stopped the temperature from rising. After that, the State Department started acknowledging the fact that there did seem to be some aralen resistant strains of malaria in West Africa. My sons had the aralen resistant strain. It didn't help my wife's feeling about Cotonou, to go through a difficult time like that. But my sons and I retain good feelings about Benin.



Q: How did you find your staff?

TWINING: The good thing about Benin, as I mentioned, was that people had been well educated until the revolution. The Embassy happily had some of these well-educated Beninese working for it, those who stayed in the country. The small American staff was composed of good, dedicated individuals with whom it was a joy to work, as well. So, staff wise, our situation was fine. Household staff was equally good, accustomed to working for foreigners for a long time. We had a head of household who was the best I've seen in any place I've been in in the world. Staff-wise, we were very well served in Cotonou. To bring an end to the Cotonou saga - because it ended prematurely for mthe post remained open. For our Fourth of July, a year after my arrival, we went from only having had a Foreign Minister the previous year, who went to every embassy's national day, to having seven ministers attend.

Q: The upshot?

TWINING: In sum, what happened during the first year is that we went from a very difficult relationship with Benin to one that was evolving positively. We started to look more at things we could do together, where we might vote in the United Nations together, what we could do with our Peace Corps program and how to stretch our AID resources a little further to help Benin with appropriate gestures from that government in return. So, toward the end of the first year, Washington sent someone out to Cotonou to say, "Things had turned around so well, we want you to leave soon, to be replaced by a full ambassador." I was disappointed, and my boys were disappointed. It meant pulling up roots after a year, after they learned French and made some good friends. I also had made good friends. But, things evolved so well and quickly that after one year, I was replaced by Ambassador George Moose, as chief of mission in Benin. I left Benin with a feeling of sadness, but also one of satisfaction that we saved the place from closing. I was glad to have been part of the improvement in the relationship.

Q: Wrapping up our discussion of Benin, what lessons were learned from the experience?



TWINING: Most of all, it is that it is important to "hang in there" when there is a downturn in a relationship, almost regardless of the reason, unless a place has literally fallen apart, as in Somalia, and one has to leave to save one's skin. We could have closed up in Cotonou, but what would that have done? As we learned from Vietnam when we closed our post in Hanoi in 1955 due to harassment, terrible times and misunderstandings ensued, and it was a struggle to get internal U.S. agreement to reopen finally forty years afterward. Not only was the decision made to keep Cotonou open but it was important to keep some semblance of an American program going during the difficult period of hostile revolution. The number of Peace Corps volunteers shrank to six at one point, but the program remained alive, as did small AID program although administered from Tog and our small Cultural Center operation. Showing some goodwill, even if it sometimes means turning the other cheek temporarily, and maintaining steadiness in your operation while reaching out to those individuals who appear open to contact, and trying with those who do not, all are formulas that I believe are correct. I recall my first meeting with President Kerekou; he was suspicious, sometimes hostile, yet nevertheless willing to meet with me, hear what I had to say, and at least consider it. The next time was easier for us both. Revolutions go up and come back down, and we are "big enough" to take the ups and downs.

As my staff and I tried to reach out to the Beninese, it was also important that Washington supported us, and it did so under Assistant Secretary Crocker, DAS Bishop, DAS Princeton Lyman, and office director Keith Wauchope. The lesson I draw from this is that Washington should give an envoy its confidence or, put another way, enough rope to hang himself if things do not turn out the way he recommends. Had Washington been second guessing me and considering an occasional setback a fatal blow, then I could not have operated and we could well have given new wind to Benin's flagging revolution.

Q: This would be in 1983. Where did you go?

TWINING: The African Bureau proposed that I move down the West African coast to the seaport of Douala in Cameroon, in 1983. I served as Consul General there for two years. When I arrived, Cameroon had just lost its first and only president in late 1982, when President Ahidjo stepped down for health reasons, in favor of his Prime Minister, Paul Biya. Just after I arrived in Douala, President Biya came to Douala to tell people about the things he was going to do. He pledged to introduce democracy into that one-party state, a step that he took seven years to carry out.

Q: What were the post's primary responsibilities?



TWINING: With a small but active staff, the Consulate General focused on several key areas. First was commercial: Douala was the commercial capital of Cameroon as well as the regional commercial capital. Second was consular: we issued more visas in Douala than the embassy in the inland capital, Yaounde. Third was political: the government in the capital felt that Douala was a city of opposition. People spoke more freely in Douala than in seemingly uptight Yaounde. The consular district covered the bottom third of Cameroon, from the border of Equatorial Guinea, on the east, to the border of Nigeria on the west. It went from heavy rain forest, beautiful black-sand beaches, a sometimes active volcano on Mt. Cameroon, to rolling green hills up in the North West Province. There was a dynamic Cameroonian and non-Cameroonian business community, missionaries and linguists, a great Peace Corps program, and solid AID activities. It was a super assignment.

Q: What was the government of Cameroon like at that time?

TWINING: Cameroon, at that time, had been independent for 23 years. It had united the half of former British Cameroon that voted to join French Cameroon, with French Cameroon. Cameroon remained French and English-speaking, with a pidgin English often serving as the lingua franca. In the government, the president of the country was a French speaker, and the vice president was an English speaker. The president of the National Assembly was an English speaker. In reality, the government was very much controlled by the French speakers, who dominate to this day.

Q: Did we have any issues in Cameroon?

TWINING: I suppose the simple answer is "No." It's true; we wished there had been more openness in the country. We were encouraged by President Biya's promise that on his watch, he was going to do so, but Biya had proven to be a cautious leader who never enacts changes quickly. Our commercial relationships were good. An American oil company, Pecten, now part of Royal Dutch Shell, had a large operation based in Douala, working off the coast of Cameroon. I think we respected the way Cameroon was a moderate state in the international realm. It supported the free enterprise system and respected that we had economic-commercial interests. The French were the important foreign player in Cameroon, as in most of the Francophone states. We weren't there to take over the French position. We couldn't compete with the French. Our aid was never near the level of French aid. We had not educated as many Cameroonians in the U.S. as the French had done in France. That was the reality of Cameroon. It was a very pro-French, single party state, though there was also room for us to conduct our diversified relations.

Q: Did you have a French counterpart in Douala?



TWINING: Yes, of course.

Q: How did you get along with him or her?

TWINING: We had fine relations. I have found that I've always been able to have good relations with French counterparts. Indeed, it is important. There was an attempted coup in Cameroon in 1984. I happened to be traveling some 50 miles away from Douala, in the middle of nowhere, when my driver turned on the radio. We heard that there had been a coup attempt. While focused especially on Yaounde, there was also coup activity in Douala. When an element of the military rose up, thankfully the coup was put down. The failure had the effect of causing any ambitious military officers to think twice before wanting to stage a coup again. That was the one and only real coup attempt, in 1984. By the time I was able to get back to Douala, things had become almost entirely under control again. Vice Consul Karl Wycoff had done a fine job calming the American community and International School and keeping in contact with the Embassy in Yaounde. One of the people with whom I could link up and compare notes subsequently was the French Consul General. I realized just how important that tie was. I was glad we had a good solid tie.

Q: Did you have any consular problems, Americans in trouble or that sort of thing?

TWINING: No, you had your share of Americans who were penniless. You had your share of Cameroonians and traveling Nigerians who would try anything to get an American visa. You had those normal problems that you have anywhere. There was the crash of a Cameroon Airlines plane as it was trying to land in Douala. While no Americans were among the dead, one American was very badly injured and had to be evacuated.

One special responsibility of the Consulate General was to provide support to our Embassy in nearby Equatorial Guinea. Equatorial Guinea was a very tough place. We had a very tiny embassy there consisting of an ambassador and a junior officer. Once a week we had to get goods over there so they could survive. The Embassy Americans would come back and forth on a plane that my office chartered for them. They would sometimes have consular problems that we had to try to help out on. At one point, in fact, Washington asked me to travel over to the capital, Malabo, to make sure that our Embassy people were standing up well under the stresses of a tough dictatorship. They were well, but conditions were hard. I remember going into a market that had absolutely nothing in it. One lady had been selling a few wrinkled yams. That is all I remember for sale in that market. There was simply no way for our people to survive on the local economy. Equatorial Guinea had reverted into a subsistence economy, basically.



Q: Were there those who thought at the time, "What the hell are we doing there?"

TWINING: Yes, you had to ask yourself that question. If you remember Equatorial Guinea in the terrible days of the first dictator, Nguema, our number two there stabbed the communicator fatally. It was a very nasty business. It was the stresses of the time, probably more than anything else, that made him go off. That is the kind of thing that caused us worry about our people in Malabo, even under a different chief of state. Nevertheless, many people felt it was important for us to have a post and be present everywhere in the world. I think there are very good arguments to be made for that. Equatorial Guinea was one of those that indeed we made that argument for.

Q: Who was the ambassador in Cameroon?

TWINING: When I was in Douala, the ambassador in Yaounde was Myles Frechette. His deputy was William Milam. So, they were up in Yaounde, a couple of hundred miles away, jointed then by a very bad road from Douala.

Q: Myles Frechette was almost an exile from Latin America, I think. He had gotten crossways with the Cuba lobby. It was basically not his fault, but he was just the wrong guy at the wrong time, trying to push our Cuba policy. The powers that be in Miami, went after him.

TWINING: That seems to be the case. While he was not an Africa person per se, Ambassador Frechette spoke excellent French and was a top-flight professional. He was able to operate without any problem in Cameroon. He was a quick learner.

Q: How was life for your family in Douala?

TWINING: Douala was excellent, with fine restaurants and great social life. I had wanted to keep my sons in the French school system, but others pressed me that if there was an international school supported by the State Department, then I should put my children in that school. I lost that argument. But kids adapt easily and were very happy in school. Store-wise, we could buy almost anything we needed. Cameroon is a rich country. Even in those days, the stores were fine stores. You didn't want for very much. Pecten Oil brought in a large number of families and supported a Cub Scout troop, for example, in which my oldest son participated. It was a good atmosphere. The Cameroonians are a bright, dynamic people, and life was agreeable.



I came up with a theory that people who live on the ocean are more open to the outside world than the people living in the middle of a rain forest. Yaounde was in the middle of a rain forest. Residents of Douala were linked up with Coastal West and Central Africa, flew easily to France, looked out at the U.S. They spoke beautiful French. They, too, wanted the best of consumer products, if they had the money to buy those products. They were people of the world. It was very easy to fit into Cameroonian society in Douala. The whole family loved it.

Q: Did the Cameroonians get to Paris whenever they could? We're talking about the government class, the top people?

TWINING: Again, I didn't see the government class as much as I saw the business class. But they headed off to Paris just as often, and you drank lots of champagne with them. Not to omit the fact that there were slums and crime in Cameroon, and a rural exodus, in which lots of people came to Douala to try to earn more money than they could digging holes in a dry field somewhere. Yes, Cameroonians in Douala very much looked to France. The elite looked to French fashions. Even those who were less than elite were people who were more at ease with foreigners, and I think with foreign trends, it made it much easier.

Q: Any other comments regarding the Douala tour of duty, e.g., travel, similarities to other tours of duty?

TWINING: There were many opportunities to travel in the Douala consular district, and it was important for us to do so if we were to stay on top of developments, as well as maintain contact with our own citizens and answer questions or give other kinds of assistance, as required. The Embassy provided us with a good four-wheel drive vehicle for that purpose. There was a large Peace Corps contingent throughout Cameroon, including in the provinces for which I was responsible, where they were engaged in teaching, fisheries development, agriculture, and cooperatives. It was always fun to drop in on them, see how they were doing, and bring them news of the outside world. We oversaw an active self-help program throughout the consular district, with some of our funds used to support Peace Corps-generated projects, and kept an eye on AID-sponsored activity. In many ways much of what we did was similar to the Vietnam assignment, trying to support local development while maintaining a feel for the situation, particularly as it affected U.S. interests. For an activist like myself, it was ideal.



The consular district covered a unique area. It included all of the portion of former British Cameroons which federated with, and was later united with, French Cameroon. (Another part of British Cameroons voted to join Nigeria). One was forever aware of the sensitivities of the English-speaking minority and perceived or real discrimination by the majority francophones, the below the surface independence movement among Anglophones, and the need to support genuine integration. It is perhaps not surprising that the leading challenger to President Biya when the winds of change opened up Cameroon in 1990 was a friendly bookseller, John Fru Ndi, located in the largest Anglophone city, Bamenda, in the North West Province. Once he emerged, he incarnated all sorts of hopes of the Anglophones. Even in 1983-85, it was important for us to know key Anglophones such as Dr. John Foncha and Samuel Muna, as well as the francophone Cameroonians, of course.

Among the francophones were members of the dynamic Bamileke ethnic group, located in the West Province of the consular district. This amazing group generated a slew of industrious businessmen and other entrepreneurs who had a unique system for mobilizing capital, the tontine system. Bamileke also dominated Douala's vibrant commercial sector. Such well organized individuals inevitably drew the suspicion of authorities in the then one-party state, convinced the Bamileke wanted political domination as well as commercial. It was an interesting scene to observe.

Q: Well, then you moved on. Where did you go?

TWINING: The African Bureau had amazing stability in the 1980s, with Chester Crocker as the Assistant Secretary of State for eight years. DAS Jim Bishop called me after two years in Douala.

Q: This would have been when?

TWINING: 1985. I had been looking to go to Swaziland. I had always wanted to see the green hills of Swaziland and I thought it would be a lovely place for a family. But, he said, "Charlie, we need you in Ouagadougou." I said, "Well, I know Ouagadougou, I've gone there with Crossroads Africa in 1962 as a student. I was a desk officer from 1970 to 1972. I know it well, and like it very much, but I really want to go to Swaziland." He said, "No, the need for you is in Ouagadougou. They are undergoing a revolution right now. We need someone who knows the lay of the land, and knows how to deal with people in a revolution. So, maybe you can go to Swaziland some other time, but right now, I would really appeal to you to go to Ouagadougou and be deputy chief of mission." Therefore, in 1985 we went to Ouagadougou for three years.

Q: Ouagadougou is the capital of?



TWINING: They had just changed the name from Upper Volta to Burkina Faso.

Q: You were there from when to when? What were your responsibilities? Tell me about the Embassy.

TWINING: I was in Ouagadougou from 1985 to 1988 as Deputy Chief of Mission. I had taken the DCM course at FSI in 1982, prior to departing for Cotonou as the permanent Chargé d'Affaires, training which stood me in good stead for this new job. With one exception, that of Ambassador Elliot Skinner, the prominent anthropology professor who had led my Operations Crossroads Africa group in 1962, all our Ambassadors to Upper Volta / Burkina Faso have been career people. Leonardo Neher was Ambassador when I arrived. He left in 1987, and I was Chargé d'Affaires for several months until the arrival of a colleague, David Shinn, as the new Ambassador. The Embassy was a medium-sized post, with a large AID mission running one of our most important programs of assistance in Africa, as well as a Cultural Center and an especially successful Peace Corps program. An Ambassador and a DCM work out a division of labor, the Ambassador being more the outside man and the DCM the internal manager and alter ego. That was certainly the case in Ouagadougou. Both Ambassadors gave me lots of opportunities to do internal travel, and we all took part in overseeing a large and vigorous self-help program.

Q: What was the situation there?

TWINING: The revolution had begun in 1983 when a group of four young officers headed by Captain Thomas Sankara took over the government. They decided that capitalism had left the country behind, and it was time to follow some other direction. They, too, linked up with Libya and the Soviets. They thought the Soviets could show them how to do it. The Libyans could help them financially. Libya, in particular, had strong influence in Burkina Faso while I was there. Also, John Jerry Rawlings of Ghana had preceded them in trying the radical way of development. Sankara thought he would follow his "big brother", John Jerry Rawlings' example. He would develop Burkina along socialist lines.

Q: How was it working?



TWINING: There was a considerable element of self-reliance in their approach. On Saturdays, Sankara would go out with the entire government and work with the population. People would be there pounding sticks in the ground to build a railroad. The rails would go in all directions. They planted trees everywhere in the country in the face of the advance of the Sahara. Trees had their merits, but nobody thought to ensure that, after planting, the trees would continue to be watered. The trees often died. People went to so much effort, with the best of intentions. The government nationalized private companies, just like Benin had done. The companies were all going down the drain.

The region formed something called Committees for the Defense of the Revolution. Members were 15-year-old kids with Kalashnikovs, who would stand out on the highway and stop you. They were young thugs. They didn't care if you were a diplomat or if you were an ordinary Burkinabe, as the people came to be called. It was a tough time. Like Benin's, this regime also loved the communist theme song, the "Internationals." It also converted these revolutionary songs for people to learn. Sadly, Burkina had always had a traditional and modern elite, the latter not very large, but the country needed those educated people. This revolution drove them out or underground. Those who stayed there were under suspicion and they were watched. At the height of the revolution, this easy going country became a very somber place.

Q: Without the real nastiness, it almost sounds like Cambodia.

TWINING: It was, except there weren't the killing fields. The people in the Sahel are gentle, very human people, very warm people. They don't go in much for that kind of killing. Yet, under that regime some occurred, particularly thanks to one of Sanhara's henchmen. The country has had coups before and after. But before the coup that brought these four officers into power, no one was killed. There was some killing with this new crowd, however. That was sad, because you felt the country lost its innocence after 1983. I began my assignment at the height of the revolution, then watched it run out of steam.

Q: Who was in charge of the Embassy when you were there?



TWINING: A fine gentleman named Julius Walker was Ambassador at the time of the change of regime and encountered very tough problems, leading again to questions in Washington as to whether the U.S. should keep an Embassy open. Once again, the decision was taken to stay and a wise experienced officer named Leonardo Neher was carefully chosen as the new U.S. Ambassador in 1984, it being thought that his calm, friendly and fatherly manner could appeal to these young Turks running Burkina and help put them on the right track. When I arrived a year later and would accompany him on calls on them, I found they were usually at ease listening to him, receiving his counsel. His approach was one of a friend, not of a harsh, know-it-all critic. It must have required great patience and restraint on Ambassador Neher's part. The mercurial President Sankara, in particular, seemed to appreciate both his approach and the overall relationship. Neher appeared to have a beneficial calming effect on him.

Sometimes Sankara and the other three young leaders would act on the Ambassador's advice, other times not. For example, Neher would say, "Look, it's not normal to have these 15 year old kids stopping and bothering people for no apparent purpose." They would sometimes reply, "You're right, we have to bring that under control." Or he might point to some of the radical things they were trying to do and say, "It just doesn't make sense for a poor country like yours to follow this route that is not going to get you where you are trying to go. Perhaps here is another approach." It was a constant effort that Ambassador Neher made, in any case, and one I tried to emulate in my own contacts with as wide a variety of the younger revolutionaries as possible. He was the right Ambassador to have in Burkina at that time.

Q: What was your own personal situation?



TWINING: Despite the tense times, particularly at first, it was a very good posting for the family. The Burkinabe are among the world's friendliest people, in my view, and very nice toward children. There was a small, but fine, international school my sons Dan and Steve attended. It was easy to travel around the country. The revolution wasn't as harsh outside the capital city region, and villagers welcomed you. The game parks were great. Until Sankara for reasons still unexplained decided one day that Peace Corps had to go (probably either to please one of his donor countries like Libya or due to paranoia into which one of his allies probably fed suggesting that Peace Corps Volunteers were nothing but spies), our PCVs around Burkina were happy and motivated, and fun to visit. The U.S. was trying its best to reach out and work with the new authorities, with an extensive AID program aimed at helping address the basic human needs of that impoverished country and with an active United States Information Service outreach. American NGOs were active, particularly Catholic Relief Services. We enjoyed interacting with all the activity going on. In those days, for morale reasons, State was spending money to make sure that Embassy personnel regardless of level in the African Sahel had swimming pools, a modest expenditure worth every penny. I had a nice, modest home with a pool over near the University on the eastern edge of town in what the government called the outer security perimeter. On the other side of my back wall was the inner security perimeter which enclosed villas for the five members of the Council of the Entente. During the Sankara period it became the off-limits location for the coup leaders to work secretly.

In order to get to my house one had to drive past a machine gun post, which was always manned. One evening I came home and found my sons riding on the machine gun, next to grinning soldiers. It provided me an insight that there was hope in the revolution when neighborhood children were allowed to go ride on the machine gun, that hopefully this revolution could be brought more under control.

In 1987 President Sankara was killed about 200 meters from my house.

Q: Oh, boy. How did that come about?



TWINING: Even today, the story isn't very clear. I was Chargé d'Affaires by that time. Ambassador Neher had left, and then several months passed before Ambassador Shinn arrived. I was 400 kilometers away. It was a school holiday, and I had taken my family out of town, to the city of Bobo-Dioulasso. My sons, to this day, haven't forgiven me because they missed the coup. I returned to Ouagadougou the next morning. There were spent cartridges all around my house. The new President, Blaise Compaore, one of the original Young Turks, called in the French Ambassador, and then me in, to say, "Sadly, someone killed our president yesterday, and I have to take over." I said to him, "Well, where were you at that time?" He said, "I had terrible malaria and was at home. All I could hear were the gunshots." Maybe that was the case, and maybe it wasn't. But, in any case, several military personnel killed President Sankara, then the next day, several of his henchmen. You realized this was a situation where the regime was eating itself up. It was after I left in 1988 that the two other military officers, who had taken power with Sankara and Compaore, were tried for treason and sentenced to death. It went from four to one. That was the story of Burkina Faso's revolution. Most of the radicalism stopped then.

Q: What was the role of the French there?

TWINING: The 1983 revolution was very much a reaction against the French. Burkina is such a poor country, like Mali and Niger. It was relying on French aid, more than anything else. These young military officers felt they could find another economic philosophy of development. They could find others to give them aid. They would no longer be beholden to the French, as their elders had been, but would be truly non-aligned. During the revolutionary period in Burkina, the French were always under suspicion; the leaders felt the French would try to overthrow them, that they would find some nefarious way to do it. The French were more suspect than the U.S. In any case, the French were watching the situation as we were, without knowing exactly what was going to happen and trying to remain patient.

Q: Were the Libyans and the Soviets sort of top dog?

TWINING: The Libyans were top dog, and I guess the Soviets were number two. I remember when Qadhafi came to Ouagadougou, as he also had come to Cotonou during my time there. Sankara and the others would go up to Tripoli. That tie was very important.

Q: How do you feel the Libyans stood? The Soviets were all over Africa, but they never really developed their ties. They didn't really like it. The Americans, for the most part, liked Africa, and liked Africans. Well, how about the Libyans? They had been the slave traders.



TWINING: You would remind Burkinabe from time to time the facts about the Libyans. Personally, I found the Libyans had a very superior attitude toward the Africans. I found it in Benin. I found it in Ouagadougou. They had nice Mercedes and BMWs and they loved going around in them. They gave a BMW to Sankara to keep him happy. That was all good, and yet were they great fellow Africans? They often would drink together, if that indicates anything.

Q: Drink together?

TWINING: Oh, yes.

Q: I'm just wondering, because these are good solid Muslims.

TWINING: Oh, well, there are limits. They would party together. They were great friends, and yet how well they personally connected, I always had my doubts about it. Certainly, they connected better than the Soviets did. But, with that connection, also went assistance agreements, often to form joint enterprises.

Q: Any lessons learned from the Burkinabe experience?

TWINING: Once again I am convinced of the wisdom of preserving through a less than easy situation, believing that we can give guidance like a friend instead of taking umbrage at incidents that, in hindsight, are unimportant. For example, Sankara received Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega and treated him equal to, and probably superior to, French President Mitterrand when he visited. On the occasion of the Ortega visit, and I was Chargé<sup>1/2</sup>, Sankara used the press to mock me for having had to act diplomatic at a dinner. Most Burkinabe thought it was a ridiculous slam of a diplomat, but I found it easier to laugh along with them than to take offense. We were particularly upset by his expulsion of the Peace Corps, but even then sought not to burn any bridges in the hope that Peace Corps could return, and it has returned, in force. It was important to seek access to the revolutionary elements in charge, and we did it, having long discussions with its members at various levels and finding, for the most part, that these were people sincerely dedicated to improving their country and not quite sure how to do it. In sum, it was a situation with which you could work. We were happy to extend our tour of duty there from two to three years.

Q: Well, you left there when?



TWINING: I left in 1988. In 1988, I received a call from the State Department and was told, "We need a new director for Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Things seem to be evolving in that area. We need someone with experience in the region and who can help move things ahead in the future." I became the Office Director in 1988 for Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia in the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs.

Q: From 1988 to when?

TWINING: 1988 to 1991.

Q: How was your time working there? Could you look at each country in 1988 and summarize our relations and policies with each country?

TWINING: I think that is a very good idea. We almost have to think back as to what was happening in the world. You had three countries, all associated with the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was clearly already weakening at that point. Vietnam and Laos had basically the leadership that had been in place since the 1970s and Cambodia since 1979. It was leadership that hadn't produced many results, and a leadership that was starting to wonder whether there should be some change in approach. I think you had a mood in the United States that was really starting to evolve as well. You had American liberals arguing that we have full relations with those three countries, treat them like anyone else, and let bygones be bygones. You also had people on the right who were convinced all of these countries were bad guys and we shouldn't be doing anything to help them.

There were several elements in the U.S. pressing for more involvement. There was the POW/MIA movement, especially the National League of Families directed by its dynamic director, Mrs. Ann Mills Griffiths. These were the people who wanted the fullest possible accounting of the missing Americans from the war. They realized that to do that, we had to be on the scene in those three countries. We had to have talks, relationships with them, to one degree or another. We had an active program of accepting refugees into the United States. That included an Orderly Departure Program office located in Ho Chi Minh City, staffed by American Foreign Service personnel. Pressure was on us to step up refugee processing as well as to deliver immigrant visas to immediate family members of former refugees who were now citizens. You had some people on Capitol Hill who were also saying that we needed to look at the future, rather than the past. In addition, some U.S. business sectors, such as petroleum, were anxious to begin working in one or more of the countries. Tourists wanted to travel to Vietnam.



Hanoi had evolved from occupying southern Vietnam and trying to reshape it in a communist mold after 1975 to realizing that that didn't work. By 1988 there was increasing openness and growth in the Vietnamese economy, both in the north and the south. Laos moved more slowly but was also trying to figure out how to become more open. At least we were able to talk with the Lao through our embassies, although not always very productively.

Cambodia was a very special case. The Khmer Rouge had been thrown out by the Vietnamese in late 1978 and beginning of 1979. But in 1988, there were still Vietnamese troops throughout Cambodia. What we considered a puppet government that the Vietnamese had put in place was running Cambodia. There was continued insecurity in Cambodia, particularly due to Khmer Rouge resistance, aided by the Chinese. We, along with other Western and Southeast Asian nations, were supporting two smaller non-communist resistance groups to make sure they at least didn't disappear. By 1988, all were wondering how much longer this sad state of affairs was going to continue.

Q: You were there from 1988 until when?

TWINING: On what the Cambodians said was a real good luck number, I went in on 8/8/88 and stayed until the summer of 1991. The office was small but very busy. I had a hardworking deputy Michael Marine, then Marie Huhtala and desk officers for the three countries, Don Stader and Frank Light on Vietnam and Harvey Somers for Laos and Cambodia. Mr. Somers deserves lasting credit for having come up with many of the ideas for the Cambodian peace agreement.

Q: What was the attitude within the Asian Pacific bureau toward your operation at that time? They had Japan, and Indonesia, and obviously, there was a certain country called China, which was taking up their time. Had you sort of slipped from the radar, or what?

TWINING: You know, I'm not sure we ever slipped from the radar. People who worked on my countries even in the early 1980s told me how busy they had been. It was more than they ever expected. It was equally true for my staff and me, when I came in in 1988. I would say the pace increased particularly when a very interested Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific was named at the outset of the Bush I administration, Dr. Richard Solomon. From that time on, the Indochina and China portfolios were the two most important to which he devoted his time. We were often there at 8:00 at night, working on issue papers, working with him, working with the Deputy Assistant Secretary, David Lambertson. The China and VLC [Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia] offices would be there when the rest of the Bureau would have gone home.

Q: Well, let's talk about prior to your going there. What was this organization working so hard on?



TWINING: There was a panoply of things. You had close to one million Vietnamese refugees in the United States, creating family reunification issues. There were American companies which wanted to get more and more involved in Vietnam, such as those that had done oil exploration offshore, up to 1975. They wanted to get back in and complete that exploration. You had all the POW/MIA pressures. You would be bombarded by people from the American Legion to the National League of Families asking, "What are we doing?" They wanted to know how we were moving that issue forward. Cambodian-Americans and Lao-Americans pressed us to support the resistance. There was enough of a gamut of interests that, quantity wise, gave you a lot to do.

Q: Well, on the POW/MIA thing, this is 1988, thirteen years after we had left the area. Had, by this time, the focus gone more toward bodies or was there still a conspiracy cloud hanging over? That somehow or another, there were pockets of American servicemen being held in bamboo cages, somewhere out in the jungle?

TWINING: That is an excellent question. It was still a mixture of both attitudes. There was the feeling, increasingly that there were no live Americans any longer, and yet there were people convinced that there must still be some there. Senator Bob Smith of New Hampshire was sure there were Americans being held prisoner in Vietnam. There was a Congressman, who is still in the Congress, who basically didn't believe what we were saying. He knew if he went to Laos, he would find out where the Americans were being held. We encouraged him to go, and he returned home far less certain of his views.

Q: What was sponsoring this? Would you say this was delusional? Was this political? Was this belief? Did you get any feel for this side?

TWINING: I think there were people who truly believed there were still live Americans, truly believed it. I don't think it was political. I don't know that it was based on very much except hope. You still had the rumor mill going. In Ho Chi Minh City, entrepreneurs were still manufacturing dog tags of American soldiers. You would hear about these dog tags. You would get one, and the Pentagon had to track down whether this person was dead or alive. Then, you would find the person was living in Toledo, Ohio, but his dog tag had just surfaced, so there were those who thought it was evidence of either his remains or that he must be held prisoner. You had that kind of thing happening. People who believed that live prisoners were still there would look for the craziest things. You had to deal with all kinds.



Q: I would think this would be very hard. For anybody, in my opinion, the logic is what is the point of keeping prisoners just to cause trouble, it's going to destroy things, and what are you going to do with the prisoners? Slave labor, if you're going to keep darts on them... It doesn't really come out. These guys never really did good work. So, here you are, looking at this thing in a logical way, up against the true believers. This must have been very difficult for you to try to explain or to deal rationally with them.

TWINING: We had nonstop, inter-agency meetings; the Pentagon, the State Department, the NSC, CIA. We worked considerably with the Congress and with private groups. Mrs. Griffiths of the National League of Families received a security clearance in order to attend our meetings and read all the traffic, as we worked together to agree on how best to deal with the POW/MIA issue. Note that Mrs. Griffiths worked with all levels of State, DOD, and the NSC, particularly Mr. Richard Childress at NSC. We may not have always been in agreement, but she worked with us fairly. It was clear early on that you could never deal with the issue fully until you had a commitment from the three countries that you could go anywhere, any time of your choosing, to investigate a rumor of someone being held in a Lao cave, for example.

Q: When you took over this job, was this a proposal that was conceivable at that time? Did you think you would get something for this?

TWINING: You never knew. At that time, we didn't have any assurance that we could do that. Yet, we realized we had to keep pushing for openness, openness of access, openness of government archives. It was simply something that you had to push for in diplomatic conversations, with the Vietnamese, with the Lao. We hadn't started yet in Cambodia, but even then, we would talk to the Soviets about talking to their Cambodian friends, to try to get the kind of access that was important to have, if you were going to resolve once and for all, that there were still live Americans.

Q: How were the different groups responding? I'm talking about the government officials.



TWINING: We generally felt that Cambodia and Laos would follow the lead of the Vietnamese. If the Vietnamese seemed to be opening up a little bit, we then felt, especially with the Lao, that we would have a chance of getting them to open up a little bit. Yet sometimes, we would propose having a meeting with the Vietnamese, Lao, and the U.S. military, just for technical talks. Then, we would find the Lao, and later the Cambodians didn't want to do it with the Vietnamese. They felt they were sovereign, and why should they be seen to be looking like they were under the Vietnamese thumb. So you had to play this at different angles. But, there were opportunities to talk, and during my time as Director of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, we would work on this issue as we would work on other issues, either with the regimes themselves, or through intermediaries. The POW/MIA issue was declared by President Reagan, and the first President Bush, as our highest national priority. So, you always had to incorporate this issue in any contacts you had.

Q: Well, talking about contacts, were we under restraints, such as we one time had with the PLO, that you couldn't talk to them, or was this a looser type thing?

TWINING: You never knew, but the point was a valid one. Because we kept relations going with the Lao, we could talk to the Lao, we could deal with them as you would any other country, even though there would be some hesitancy on their side Lao diplomats being the cautious type and sometimes a little reluctance on our side. At least there we could have normal conversations when the atmosphere was right.

With Vietnam, we had to look for contact points. In the 1988 period, for example, the contact point was through the American Embassy in Bangkok, talking with the Vietnamese Embassy. We also used the Vietnamese Mission in New York increasingly as a point of contact. Just as we deal with the North Koreans today, it would be the East Asian Bureau which would say yea or nay to any or all contact with the Vietnamese Mission in New York. We would not pass through USUN. Rather DAS Lambertson or his replacement, Kenneth Quinn, or I or a member of my staff would speak directly with the Vietnamese Mission in New York to pass on messages, to receive messages, to hear about complaints, and so forth. We often traveled to New York to meet with them.

With the Cambodians, on the other hand, we simply had no contact with the regime in Phnom Penh. The Reagan and Bush White House felt very strongly that as long as Vietnamese troops were in Cambodia, the Cambodians should not be considered a dialogue partner, they were simply "puppets". That really limited any approaches to the Cambodians. In hindsight, that was unfortunate.

Q: During this 1988 to 1991 period, let's stick to the missing in action type thing. Was there any progress made?



TWINING: A great deal of progress was made. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Robert Kimmitt took a particular interest in this issue. He provided us the political support to help move things forward. Retired General John Vessey was named a special emissary of the president and traveled particularly to Vietnam to negotiate POW/MIA issues, work out the establishment of our POW/MIA office in Hanoi, and expand the extent of our POW/MIA activity. As a four-star general, he had considerable clout with both sides and helped end speculation in the U.S. that there were any live prisoners.

We also established a similar POW/MIA office of military personnel in Vientiane. Staff members weren't there as defense attachés, they were there for that one issue, only, to pursue leads and support excavation activity in areas of suspected losses. Slowly but surely we increased the number of search operations in Laos. After quiet contacts conducted by Chief of Mission Charles Salmon in Vientiane, the Bush Administration finally gave permission to our military specialists to have a non-political, quiet meeting with the Phnom Penh regime on this issue. But we had so few missing in action in Cambodia, military as well as civilians, that it wasn't quite the priority that Laos and Vietnam were. In all three countries, progress was made thanks to an increasing openness on their sides and a more flexible approach on our own. All three also wanted something from us: more normal relations. They saw POW/MIA activity as a kind of bargaining chip. I believe we can conclude that the POW/MIA issue helped drive the diplomacy leading to normalization of relations with Vietnam and upgrading of relations with Laos, as well as contributed to our determination to help settle the Cambodian conflict.

Q: Well, what were they doing? I mean, these missions?

TWINING: These POW/MIA offices that were formally in place in Hanoi and in Vientiane, were there to handle everything relating to POW/MIA. They would pick up and investigate rumors of missing Americans. Sometimes they would receive remains and get them back to Honolulu to a laboratory for examination. They handled investigations of dog tags. They handled whatever came up. Most importantly, they would seek permission from the Vietnamese or Lao for site surveys and excavations and provide logistical support.

Q: Did you get a feel for how the various Vietnamese/Cambodians/Laotians felt about all this? Did they look upon this as being an act of peculiar people, or did it fit with them? They have veneration for ancestors. Was this seen as almost a spiritual thing, or how would you say it was seen?



TWINING: It was truly a mixture of motivations. There were some who thought they could make money out of the operation, charging us two or three times the going rate for support of one kind or another, and pocketing the excess money themselves. You had people who really had sympathy for our guest, often reminding us that they would like to find out what happened to their missing and would like our help. This was true of the Vietnamese, in particular. Increasingly, we realized we needed to start looking in our own records to see where perhaps we buried the bodies of Viet Cong or NVA soldiers, to help satisfy their own search for their missing. Others thought that if they cooperated with us on MIAs, they would get visas. For many villagers in the three countries who actually did the digging for remains, it meant employment for cash.

Q: What about the dozen or so (you may know the figure, I don't) newsmen who were killed in Cambodia? I was in Saigon at the time. I remember going to the Continental Hotel where some of the newsmen resided, and packing up their belongings. Sean Flynn is one of the ones who stick in my mind. What about those? Any progress with those?

TWINING: They disappeared, as you remember, in Cambodia, killed by the Khmer Rouge. We didn't really start exploring around Cambodia until I was Chief of Mission, starting in 1991. With wonderful cooperation from Cambodian authorities who indeed agreed we could look anywhere, any time, for remains we launched POW/MIA investigations, site surveys, and excavations to look for people like Sean Flynn. Due to the turmoil and devastation during the Khmer Rouge's period, we never really got very far. We tried to investigate any leads we had. We knew where people like Flynn had disappeared. We talked to villagers. I participated in the effort myself. After we opened up in Phnom Penh in 1991, an excellent Khmer-speaking military officer, Captain Rich Arant, established a small POW/MIA office there. All of us traveled around trying to help find where some of these people disappeared.

I remember going out to eastern Cambodia, in one of the big rubber plantation areas near Memot. Villagers told us that Flynn and a couple of others were killed right in that area, and their remains were thrown down a well. I remember looking at that well. Indeed, our people came in and dug up that well. I don't think it proved to have anything, but we were always looking. We weren't just looking for the remains of military personnel, but any civilian personnel, as well.

Q: In other aspects of this, when you got there, was the Bush I administration talking about looking at ways to establish relations, particularly with Vietnam? Cambodia would almost be another thing. We already had it with Laos.



TWINING: I might go into the evolution of the Vietnam relationship. Even before the Bush I people came into office, there was some feeling of the need to move forward. Assistant Secretary of State Gaston Sigur was one of those, together with the career people, who thought we needed to advance the Vietnam relationship, though not quite knowing how. In 1989 the Bush administration took office and included a mixture of people who had been involved in the Vietnam war or were knowledgeable about Indochina. Some wanted to move forward only on POW/MIA but nothing else, particularly not until Vietnamese troops pulled out of Laos and Cambodia.

We realized we had to talk to the Vietnamese more than we had been doing. General Vessey was doing his thing, and he would tell us that beside POW/MIA, the message he was getting was Vietnam wanted more contact and more movement with the United States on other issues.

Q: By the way, had the Vietnamese long ago dropped the repatriation thing, which for a long time, was almost laughable? They thought we were going to pay them billions of dollars.

TWINING: Right. I think the figure they claimed they thought they were getting from President Nixon was something like two billion dollars. Yes, I think by my time, it had just been laughed off the street. But, there were converging interests. The Soviet Union was starting to fall. The Vietnamese were worried about Big Brother China, and yet also realized that they had to make peace with Big Brother China. I think they were a little worried about their Soviet backing failing, and with traditional enemy China on their northern border, perhaps they needed to find a way to improve things with the Americans to balance thing out. Indeed, if we Americans could just allow trade, they thought that would be very helpful. There were Americans who realized that our interests required more forthcomingness on our part. I would say that apart from POW/MIA, it was the Cambodia part of the equation that helped move things forward.

ASEAN, The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, was trying to find a solution to the continued fighting in Cambodia. It started organizing talks with all the Cambodian parties in 1988 following a December 1987 meeting between Prince Sihanouk and Hun Sen in France. But, somehow, this wasn't quite enough. We were pressing to get Vietnamese troops out of Cambodia. We too wanted to see an end to the fighting. It was draining for everybody, including the Cambodians. It was a source of divisiveness among the five permanent members of the Security Council, each with its own links to the various Cambodian factions. All were starting to get tired of this nonstop war. It was in July/August 1989 that the first peace conference on Cambodia was held in Paris. It was a month long conference. We knew we had to have discussions with the Vietnamese if we were going to make progress in Cambodia. That meant we had to persuade the Vietnamese that their troops had to leave Cambodia. We conveyed this message to Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach when Assistant Secretary Solomon met with him in Paris on the margins of the conference in July. At the same time we reiterated the need to advance our POW/MIA effort.



There were people in the Bush White House who even when the Vietnamese said, in September 1989, "Our troops have pulled out," didn't believe it. They would cite intelligence that proved the case, at least in their eyes. So, we had to keep finding ways to tell the Vietnamese that they had to get completely out of Cambodia, if they wanted to move relations forward. I accompanied a Congressional Delegation led by Congressman Stephen Solarz to Hanoi in the fall of 1989 during which he and other Members of Congress pressed Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach to get all Vietnamese troops out of the country. While I was not permitted by Washington to accompany the CODEL to Phnom Penh, it traveled there to tell Hun Sen the same thing. Secretary of State James Baker met with Foreign Minister Thach on the margins of the UN General Assembly in September 1990 to reinforce this message and discuss the POW/MIA effort and a possible settlement in Cambodia. Increasingly, the Vietnamese, interested in moving the relationship forward, complained to us, "You're always changing the goal posts. We are cooperating on POW/MIA." We told them, "We want more cooperation, and we want you to open your archives more fully so we can do our research on missing Americans. We want to have freedom of movement in Vietnam and to be able to verify that you have no troops in Laos or Cambodia." Finally, as we made progress in Cambodia, we sat down and said, "The Vietnamese are right. They need something in writing from us, what we will do if they do something."

We wrote what was called a "road map." It was a tough ordeal. It took full NSC cooperation and Presidential blessing. There were nonstop talks among the State Department, the Defense Department, the NSC, and the National League of Families, as well as a lot of contact with Capitol Hill to assess Congressional sentiment. Finally, in early 1991, Assistant Secretary Solomon and I went to New York City, sat down with the Vietnamese Ambassador and said, "We now have a plan that will lead to restoration of full relations. It shows what each of us has to do, reciprocally." While the Vietnamese reacted to a couple of points or requested clarifications, that got the process going. I must admit that there were a number of us in the State Department who thought that President Bush, as his last act in office, would announce the normalization of relations between Vietnam and the United States. By the end of the Bush administration, it was clear that there was a lot of sentiment in Washington that we were both moving forward well, and we could do this. Unfortunately, it did not happen.

I have to admit that I felt some personal satisfaction when I went to a reception 4-5 years ago at the Vietnamese Embassy here in Washington. The Ambassador, one of our most important contacts in trying to get the normalization process moving, Le Van Bang, was giving a reception for a visiting delegation for trade talks. The first thing he did at the reception was to introduce me. I was just there as a visitor, attending on the coattails of my son, Dan, who was working for Senator McCain. Ambassador Bang said, "I want everybody to know this is Ambassador Twining. He more than anyone worked quietly in the tough years to advance the process of normalization with us in Vietnam." Everyone applauded.



It was a nice diplomatic gesture. It was exaggerated. We all played parts. But I did feel a lot of satisfaction with that because we worked hard in that period of 1988 to 1991, with lots and lots of contacts, and lots of late nights. Just even doing the road map, I left the assistant secretary's office at 1:00 a.m., with my wife parked outside in the car waiting for me for hours. Dr. Solomon and I boarded the airplane at 7:00 a.m. to go to New York to present the road map. We all put a lot of time and sweat into trying to normalize our relations with Vietnam in accordance with the interests of the United States. We had to do it in a way that would fly politically, not just with the Congress, but also with veterans' groups and others.

Q: I would have thought that Congress and maybe the NSC would have feelings about this, because politics between them were a real problem. But, except for the fact that you were gobbling up resources, putting troops on the ground in the hills looking for bodies, I wouldn't have thought that the Pentagon would have any particular feeling about it.

TWINING: The Pentagon was more in tune with the sentiments of the various organizations involved in POW/MIA than any other part of the U.S. government. Every year, the National League of Families holds a meeting in Washington, D.C. The Pentagon participates fully, often led by the Secretary of Defense. Other veterans groups with often contrasting views have their respective supporters there, as well. POW/MIA is a very political issue.

We wouldn't move forward in relations with these countries unless you were really satisfied that the POW/MIA issue was moving forward. The State Department, I guess it is fair to say, had taken more of a multi-faceted approach. There has always been a sentiment in the State Department that you want to have relations with everyone. Henry Kissinger said that he would talk to the devil if it would bring peace to the Middle East. I think that is very much a State Department approach. The NSC was probably more on the side of the Pentagon than on the side of the State Department with respect to relations, but that is what made negotiating both time consuming and complex. Congressional views would be similarly varied.

Q: How did you evaluate, during the time you were doing this, there wasn't any development in this, the organization that represented the families? Because, it almost seemed to me that there is almost another agenda there, at least with some people, a conservative agenda, or not? How did you see it?



TWINING: The National League of Families was not inflexible nor unreasonable. Its members wanted to be sure the USG left no stone unturned in the search for missing Americans. Its position was a fact of life, and not one with which we who were involved necessarily disagreed personally. There were other groups strongly interested in the POW/MIA issue, as well, some like the American Legion more conservative in approach, others like the Vietnam Veterans of America more liberal, the latter believing that we could accomplish more with Hanoi if we normalized our relations. You had to deal with all these groups.

The National League of Families, though, was the most active of the groups, and seemed to represent by far the greatest number of the families of the missing in action. Therefore, you dealt with them much more intensely. You realized as you were dealing with them and their dynamic leader in particular, Mrs. Ann Mills Griffiths, that as you spoke and related to one another, you could help her see other items on the agenda that also needed to be accommodated. She could help you understand, as well, the intricacies of the whole POW/MIA effort. It wasn't a one-shot thing, you go find prisoners, and you find any bones, and then that's it. Maybe there should be some effort made to give the Vietnamese information about where their missing might be for instance. As we grew to understand one another, there was more of a collaborative relationship, regardless of some of the more conservative people in that movement, or in the other organization.

Q: Did you find there was a hard-core group of people who really didn't want to see this thing resolved, because as long as there was the thought that there were maybe POWs, it gave them a sense of fulfillment?

TWINING: This is all very true. From 1975 on, Capitol Hill often represented the people, who for their own political reasons, or emotional reasons would be the hardest to convince to open the doors a bit. It was only thanks to people like John Kerry, Bob Kerry, John McCain, and Pete Peterson...

Q: They're all Vietnam veterans. A couple of them, McCain and Peterson were POWs.

TWINING: That's right. These were the people who often were more far seeing in the need to put the past to rest, and deal with the present and the future. Some of the people, such as Jesse Helms, had never ventured near that area. You also had people who were enlightened like Stephen Solarz and Jim Leach on the House side, Senator Richard Lugar on the Senate side. Because of interest and their intellectual capabilities, they wanted to move things forward. Such support was so important in that period. Senators Kerry and McCain were part of a group in the Congress of House and Senate members who chaired a POW/MIA task force.



Frankly, through that task force, they were able to educate some of their colleagues about not only those three countries, but about how we move forward, not only on the issue, but also more generally. I have to give them a lot of credit for that.

Q: Well, one has to look at World War II, where there are hundreds if not thousands of missing in action in places like New Guinea, or Burma, of course at sea, but that is beyond the realm. Guadalcanal is one. Yet, there was never that movement. I still see firehouses, churches flying the POW/MIA flag, long after. It's been 30 or more years.

TWINING: I think the world had changed with the era of worldwide communications. The Vietnam War was the first war fought in the media. It was shown in the media nonstop. Also people were traveling more, and travel was easily done. Somehow, the mood in the world, particularly in the United States, had changed. We realized that we could find answers to questions. Explanations could now be sought as to the fate of soldiers who disappeared at Guadalcanal or in Papua New Guinea.

Q: This is tape four, side one, with Charlie Twining. What about some of the other countries, and the role they played? The French, for example. You mentioned the Paris means. The French have always maintained more cultural relations with the communists, Indochina governments than we have. Did they play a role, whether it be positive or negative, or not?

TWINING: Are you talking just about POW/MIA?

Q: No, I'm talking about over a broad range of issues.

TWINING: Oh, gosh. It's difficult, because you almost have to talk about each country and what our interests were in each country, and with whom did we relate, as we tried to advance those interests. For all of the countries, the ASEAN countries were important dialogue partners. The other four permanent members of the Security Council were important. The French were important, as you say, because of their historic legacy. They felt they understood Indochina better than we, better than anyone else. They also had contacts. But so did the Chinese, so did the Soviets. The Indonesians were extremely important. The Thai were important. I'd say the panoply of players really were our friends in Europe, our friends in Asia, Southeast Asia, plus China and Japan, and the Soviet Union. You would talk to one or the other of them on various issues of interest. The Singaporeans and we, for example, would talk about the economic sanctions that we had on Vietnam, and their own sanctions. That impacted on our thinking.



Maybe this is the point to talk about Cambodia, because things really came to a head in our general approach to Indochina with the Cambodian settlement, if you would like me to move to that.

Q: Yes.

TWINING: Okay. In Cambodia, we started to see signs that the Vietnamese were maybe starting to pull out of Cambodia, in the spring of 1989. I mentioned that ASEAN had had an ongoing negotiating diplomatic process. Its members were going to try to bring Cambodia together, because what did you have in Cambodia? You had the Phnom Penh regime put into place by the Vietnamese at the beginning of 1979. By 1988, it was just maybe two persons deep in a ministry, a district or a province, a very thinly staffed regime of Cambodians with Vietnamese advisors. You had the Khmer Rouge who had gone from being almost decimated in 1979, to having rebuilt their strength in some Thai and Lao border areas by 1988. They were giving the Vietnamese a run for their money.

You had two non-communists groups, FUNCINPEC of Prince Ranariddh, the son of Prince Sihanouk, and the KPNLF, headed by an old, wise man named Son Sann. All four groups had their military apparatus. All four groups were on the battlefield, to one degree or the other. It was doing no one any good. Those were the Cambodian parties. You had Prince Sihanouk, who was going between China, North Korea, and France. People would have contact with him. We had an Asia watcher in Embassy Paris, first Bob Kaneda, then Mark Storella, currently deputy chief of mission in Cambodia and who had earlier worked as my political officer when I opened our mission. They were our point of contact with Prince Sihanouk and his entourage in France in the late 1980s.

Except for a complete prohibition on contact with the Khmer Rouge and an unfortunate interdiction on talking with the Phnom Penh regime of Hun Sen, we would try to trade views with all these various players as to what to do on Cambodia, how to get the Vietnamese troops out and how to get peace. Of course, our interest was consistently on defanging these killers, the Khmer Rouge. Increasingly in 1989, there seemed to be a confluence of opinion among the Cambodian parties, Prince Sihanouk, Vietnam, the five permanent members of the Security Council, all the countries in ASEAN, Australia, Japan. We thought maybe it was time to bring peace to Cambodia. That is when we went to Paris in mid-July 1989. For one month, under French and Indonesian chairmanship, we tried to find a formula which would restore peace. Everyone was trying to figure out what to do. No one quite knew what to do.



I remember that our U.S. delegation went to see Prince Sihanouk right after we arrived, saying, "Your Royal Highness, how do you see a new structure in Cambodia?" He said, and I was always convinced he was right, "You've got to bring everyone, all the Cambodians, under the same tent. You can't say that you'll talk about this element or that element. You have to find a way to bring them all together." He was thinking he could play his own role. Maybe he would be chief executive. He wasn't sure what. The French came up with various plans. It was a lovely month in Paris. All of us, when we see each other, whether it be in Indonesia, or Brunei, or in Cambodia, we say "Wasn't that a wonderful month in Paris?" The French had a conference center that we occupied for a month at Avenue Kleber. They had a wine cellar that was exquisite. They would give us meals everyday, for lunch and dinner. Often, the discussions went into the evening. They were exquisite meals with exquisite wines, to the point where you would say, "Do you want to go back to negotiations?" All of us remember that in hindsight. We all talk about it. But that splendor was superficial in view of the genuine difficulties we encountered.

For a month, we tried to find a way to make peace in Cambodia. We had terrible scenes. You'd have scenes of the Khmer Rouge screaming at the Vietnamese and the Vietnamese screaming back at the Khmer Rouge. You had the non-communists attacking the Phnom Penh regime. The five permanent members of the Security Council found that we were more the peacemakers, among the Cambodians, than anything else. I remember once seeing a Chinese diplomat one morning, who said, "I was up all night." I said, "What on earth were you doing?" They were up all night telling the Khmer Rouge, "You have to try to be more accommodating than you are. You have to compromise. It just can't go in your direction." It took him all night. That man ended up being the first Chinese ambassador in Phnom Penh when we both reopened our countries' diplomatic missions there in 1991.

The first International Conference on Cambodia in July-August 1989 was a busy period. On our side, we adhered to policy and did not talk either to anyone in the Phnom Penh regime, which we called the "Hun Sen" regime, or in the Khmer Rouge. So, we would have to talk to the Soviets about the Phnom Penh people. We would have to talk to the Chinese about the Khmer Rouge. At the end of the month, everyone was drained. We had eaten well. We drank well. We had had innumerable meetings. We had lots of bilateral meetings. We sat down with the Vietnamese and the Lao. We sat down with the Chinese and the Soviets. The French sat down with all parties. The British and the Americans sat down with the members of ASEAN and with the non-communist Cambodians. We consulted with the UN. But at the end of a month, everyone was worn out. We hadn't found a way to peace.



I remember standing outside the door of the French conference center. The Cambodians were leaving. The Khmer Rouge wouldn't say anything to us, and we wouldn't say anything to them. The Phnom Penh people would look at us and kind of smile, and we would look at them and kind of smile. Then, the non-communists would go out. What I kept hearing people say, whether it was in Cambodian, French or English, was "We're going to go back to the battlefield." This was August 19, 1989. I remember saying to Washington, "The Cambodians have not yet become so tired of fighting that they're ready to make peace. They have to become tired of fighting." They said they were going back to the battlefield and indeed, that is what happened.

We had to let things settle for a few months. We had conversations with New York in 1989 when the UN General Assembly began in September. As I said earlier, I then traveled with a Congressional delegation headed by Congressman Solarz, with Congressman Bill Richardson and others to Beijing, to Hanoi. We also went to the Thai border to talk to the Cambodian non-communists. We went to Bangkok to talk to the Thai government. The CODEL visited Phnom Penh, but the Bush administration didn't allow me to go in with them. This was late 1989. The trip gave us a chance again to talk to the main Asian players. We had a fascinating night in Hanoi, for example. Conversation went on at length with Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach. Hanoi was still fairly decrepit, but it was just starting to open up a bit.

We were saying to Thach, "You've got to get all your troops out of Cambodia, and don't tell the Cambodians what to do. Let them be independent to make up their own minds." Thach said something I'll never forget. He said, "You people don't know the Cambodians. These people are hard headed. These people are stubborn. If you think we can tell Hun Sen or any other Cambodian what to do, you don't know what you're talking about. They're too stubborn. We'll tell them what to do, and they won't do it, just because it's the Vietnamese, their old traditional enemy, telling them what to do." It was a very good lesson. I think we all needed to hear that from the Vietnamese. He also maintained that they had withdrawn.

Q: Well, what was the rationale for continuing Vietnamese presence in Cambodia?

TWINING: With the Khmer Rouge getting stronger, and a weak Cambodian administration they had placed in Phnom Penh, I think they felt they had to continue to be there to shore up things, basically, so that the bad guys wouldn't threaten the place. Yet, they would tell you quietly, "We want to get out, too. It's not fun for us being there."

During this trip, we went to see Prince Sihanouk in Beijing. Sihanouk raised his hands and said, "I think there has to be a way, maybe through ASEAN, maybe through the five permanent members of the Security Council in the UN, to resume the peace process." That started us thinking of the possibilities.



The other meaningful conversation we had was in Thailand. Our CODEL visited the FUNCINPEC border camp called Site B and lunched with Prince Ranariddh, sitting at a table in the open air. This was right inside the Cambodian border, up in the forest, on the plateau that extends into northeastern Thailand. Congressman Solarz was exchanging views with Ranariddh as to how could get the peace process going again. Suddenly Congressman Solarz, the one who had taken the initiative in 1977 to expose to Americans and to the world what was happening in Cambodia, with the Khmer Rouge had an idea. He said, "Let's think through the process." He suggested that we try to organize a comprehensive peace settlement that will not only bring all Cambodians together, but will bring in the UN with a peacekeeping operation. Such a settlement could give Prince Sihanouk a role as leader of an interim body of all Cambodian factions. Together with the permanent members of the Security Council, that body could help deal with the refugees outside of Cambodia as well as with all kinds of issues that would impact on the future of Cambodia. I remember Ranariddh saying, "You know, we might be onto something. That might be the way to do it. Have a regular UN peacekeeping operation, but a much more complete one than ever before, but bring everyone together."

Soon the Australians came up with a similar concept. They even put it in something called "The Red Book." Was it inspired by Solarz, was it not? There is controversy about that. We started thinking through the suggestion a bit, asking, "How can we implement this process?" Several of us at the State Department sat down with several staffers on Capitol Hill in the East Asia conference room at the State Department, to start sketching this out. How would something like this work? It was a wonderful example of Congressional and administration collaboration.

We began drafting, mainly in my office, a peace agreement. Golly, we worked long hours. My deputy, a gentleman who is now going out to Hanoi as our ambassador, Michael Marine, would sleep on my sofa, sometimes, at night. The pressures were so intense to produce basic pieces of a peace agreement that could be shared with other permanent members of the Security Council. They would do their own drafting. The French were good at drafting, for example. But, we would all come up with bits and pieces. We would talk to the ASEAN countries. They were continuing their own peace process. We would talk to our Cambodians, and a process evolved. We would talk to the Vietnamese, too, quietly. And to others like the Australians and Japanese.

Q: Was there a UN representative there?



TWINING: We started a process in 1990. While parallel ASEAN discussions on Cambodia were underway in Jakarta, with UN representation, we began also having a series of meetings among the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, again with UN representation. Our meetings occurred at UN headquarters in New York, in Paris, or sometimes in Beijing. In our meetings, often a country with particular interest in our deliberations, such as Japan, would have representatives posted close by for consultations with us. The basic principle among the Five of us would relate to that Cambodian faction or factions that we knew best, present it with our point of view, elicit a reaction, and bring it back to another Perm Five meeting for consideration, incorporation, or rejection. Often a member would be asked to return to that faction's leaders and urge it to compromise in a particular direction for the good of the process.

Sometimes our Perm Five meetings went well, sometimes not at all. We found often in these meetings, it was the U.S., Britain, France and China on one side, and the Soviet Union on the other side. The Soviets had the most to lose. They were the ones with influence in Hanoi, through the Vietnamese with the Phnom Penh regime, the Hun Sen regime. The Hun Sen regime didn't want to give up any power. So, the Soviets would represent the Hun Sen interest and the Vietnamese interest. The four of us, who were on the outside, were saying, "You guys have to give in too." To their credit, the Soviets put a lot of pressure on Vietnam, which wanted to get out anyway, and on the Phnom Penh people, who wanted to stay and keep full power. So, during these discussions, you would have these kinds of dialogues. The UN was there because we all saw the UN having to play the key role in the peace process with a peacekeeping operation.

We would also have joint sessions sometimes with the ASEAN countries. You would bring the Cambodians in sometimes. Meanwhile, fighting on the Cambodian battlefield was getting nowhere. The Cambodians were getting tired out and were once again leaning toward a settlement. All came together, and on October 23, 1991, a peace agreement was signed in Paris. I felt considerable satisfaction since much of it been written in my office, by hardworking officers. One officer in particular, Cambodian desk officer Harvey Somers, deserves credit for much of the drafting of the language of the peace agreement.



With its implications for both funding and the involvement of U.S. military personnel, we had to get all of Washington on board, both inside the administration, including the Pentagon and OMB, and outside. We had some tough hearings on Capitol Hill, particularly with Senator Kerry. He and some others argued that, by including all the Cambodians in this peace agreement, all we were doing was supporting the future of the Khmer Rouge. They wanted to see them disappear. We would reply, "They are a reality. They are a force on the ground. They are not going to disappear just because you want them to disappear. But we feel that this peace process will take away any foothold they have in Cambodia." Otherwise the Khmer Rouge can say, "The Vietnamese and their puppets in Phnom Penh are running the show, therefore you have to support us, the Khmer Rouge. We are the only ones who can stand up to the Vietnamese and their puppets." We have to cut the ground out from under the Khmer Rouge, we told the Hill. If you had a peace agreement that would lead the way to a new government, elected by the people in Cambodia, what leg would the Khmer Rouge have to stand on in the future? By that time, the U.S. had been aiding the non-communist resistance for a half dozen years. Politically, there was less and less support in Washington to keep helping the non-communists. There were people spreading rumors that all our aid to the non-communists was going to the Khmer Rouge. It wasn't true, to the best of our knowledge. But we had to prove and prove again that to the Congress, to the best of our ability. So, the problem we had, once we had a peace agreement in Cambodia, was to prove to the Congress that the peace agreement needed U.S. funding. We were financially supporting one-third of any PKO operation in those days.

Q: PKO means peacekeeping operation.

TWINING: Peacekeeping operation. This was going to be the largest peacekeeping operation the world had ever known. It would consist of 16,000 troops and another 6,000 police and civilians. But we had to prove that through this operation, we weren't supporting the Khmer Rouge. In fact, to the contrary. So, that is the dynamic that we went through with Cambodia. It led the way to restoring peace to Cambodia, after a quarter century of fighting and killing. The agreement also impacted on our relations with Vietnam, which no longer had the Cambodian impediment, and our relations with Laos.



We haven't talked about Laos very much. Increasingly, the Lao were cooperating with us on POW/MIA. That was our main interest. Signs that the Vietnamese troops were in eastern Laos seemed to be disappearing. Increasingly, the Lao were opening up, especially to their neighbor Thailand. Indeed, we thought that was a good sign, to open up with Thailand, as well as to try to advance their relationship with China. Therefore, the Lao and we probably had room to advance our own relationship. I went on a POW/MIA trip during that period and remember distinctly the Lao being more forward leaning on POW/MIA in September 1990 than they had been before. The Lao also indicated to us they wanted to start sending an ambassador to Washington. We both had charges d'affaires since 1975. They thought it was time to normalize with the ambassador, and our thinking was moving in the same direction.

In September 1990, I sat in on a meeting that Secretary of State James Baker had in New York. It was the first meeting of a Secretary of State since the Indochina War with the Lao Foreign Minister Phoun Sipraseuth. Baker also had a meeting with Vietnamese Foreign Minister Thach. In both of those meetings, they said to us that they wanted to have better relations. James Baker said, "We want to have better relations. Let's both work together to improve the relationship." I guess I was very pleased. By the end of my tenure as director of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia in mid-1991, we had agreement to move forward with Laos and to raise the level of our representation. The first ambassador in Vientiane was Charles Salmon. That was a small satisfaction, but it was more than time to make that move.

My three years working on Vietnam/Laos/Cambodia was really a time of evolution in our relations. It made for a lot of work and very long hours, but it was an exciting time. Finally we felt that relationships that had been frozen since 1975 were now resuming. It really paved the way for eventual full relations with Vietnam, normalization with Laos, and a new relationship with Cambodia.

Q: Well Charlie that was a fascinating period, to be there to see this. There is the other side of the Foreign Service. That is to see the developments within the country. Let's take Vietnam, for example. The communist party had very strict control. They had taken over the whole thing in 1975; the exhilaration of winning was there. They had a Politburo I guess.

TWINING: They still do.

Q: They still do. But, were we able to clean up the criminology, during the time you were there? What sort of changes were happening, the streams, pressures and flows?

TWINING: Happily, we had in the U.S. government still a couple of Vietnam experts. You know, the U.S., after the fall of Indochina, just turned off, as you remember.



Q: Oh, yes.

TWINING: Those analysts, Vietnam specialists, who had been working, started looking elsewhere, or they didn't have very much work to do. One who stuck with it was a fellow named Douglas Pike, who was a very good USIA officer. But not very many stuck with it. We had in our own Intelligence and Research Bureau at the State Department another old hand, named Dottie Avery. She was one of those who could say, "This is what happened in 1979. This is what happened in 1982. This is who this person is. This person is a reformer." You really relied on some of those people who had the perspective of 30 years, and God bless them, who could help you appreciate what change was taking place. The most important change that took place really was in the hard line approach to communizing South Vietnam. Hanoi realized it just didn't work. By the late 1970s, it started to take off some of the controls, including over private enterprise, to the point where Vietnam became a huge exporter of products, and the number two producer of rice in the world. This took a lot of time to evolve. By 1988, a lot of countries were trading with Vietnam. By 1988, the Soviets who had taken over some of the oil concessions that others and we had had, were producing oil, offshore Vietnam. Vietnam was changing.

Hanoi was starting to go from a place with crummy facilities, crummy hotels, to a place where investors were starting to come in. There was a new wind blowing. I was astonished going to Hanoi a couple of times in my position as office director, to find English teaching schools set up all over the place, for people to learn English. French was disappearing in Hanoi. English was becoming the language that everybody wanted to learn. Indeed, it started up in Vientiane as well. Thai television in Vientiane made a big difference, too. Then, in Cambodia, too. When I arrived there in 1991, their English teaching establishments were starting to appear. Vietnam was really in the throes of change, and Cambodia and Laos were starting to run in the same direction.

Q: Was this change in Vietnam, for example, taking place because of the collapse of the system, a new breed of cat moving into the Politburo, or the southern Vietnamese influence? What was happening?



TWINING: You're a very good analyst yourself. I would say it was all of these things. The problem we had in Vietnam and in Laos, for a long time, was the presence of the old people who fought the wars, on the Politburo. As long as they were strong, were on the Politburo, and had their memories of Laos, of living in the caves of Sam Neua, and being bombarded all the time, or in northern Vietnam, always having to watch out for B-52 strikes, it made for tough times. But once you started having more modern people coming up through the system, even technocrats, like their first ambassador here, Le Bang, well-educated people coming up through the system, you started to have a bit of a wind of change. I suspect the younger cadres realized the old communist ways hadn't developed their countries. They had to open their door to investment. However, investors would come in only if they knew there was stability and security, and a good investment code, and the rule of law, so that if their investment was taken away, they would have some recourse in court. These countries would sign international arbitration agreements. The realization that they had to change themselves really prompted them to change, I believe, and generational change had an impact.

Q: Well, talk about the generational change. Considerably before, and certainly from the early 1980s, the Chinese had been sending their elite to the United States. The kids of the politburo got American education, practically. Were the Vietnamese able to tap into the French, some way to get their children beyond the high-bound rules of Vietnam?

TWINING: Again, where were they sending their children? They were sending them to Moscow; they were sending them to East Germany in those days. It was really the two eastern bloc countries. Yet, increasingly I think they saw the need to start sending them elsewhere. Places like Singapore started to come up on their radar screen, as a place to send their kids, some of them anyway. There was a desire in especially Vietnam, to start getting kids coming to the U.S. But, that is where we ran against the conservative, political wall here in the 1980s.

You had the Indochina Reconciliation Center in New York, headed by Mr. John McAuliff, who is still plowing forward, trying to bring about reconciliation. He thought the best way to do it was by supporting small projects in those countries, but also by getting people from those countries to come here. It was thanks to his pushing, plus some others, such as the Mennonite Central Committee, for example, that some useful steps were taken. The National League of Families helped persuade the administration that we should bring some Vietnamese to Honolulu to let them see our remains laboratory, to look at the bones we found, to engage in discussions with us. In sum, we had pressure from various groups with their own agendas, and inclinations, to start opening the doors a bit to Vietnam, including to students, and it was the same for Laos and Cambodia. That was helpful in opening the doors, not just for the U.S., but in creating a movement whereby people in those countries would start sending their kids to the west, in general, for education. With the west, I also include ASEAN, especially Thailand, Singapore. That was important, but gosh what a slow process.



I keep mentioning Ambassador Le Bang. John McAuliff brought him to the U.S. in 1990. He was the first Vietnamese official that the Bush I administration allowed to come to the U.S. He came down to Washington. The administration was not keen for us to receive him officially, but my then deputy for Vietnam/Laos/Cambodia, Marie Huhtala, subsequently Ambassador to Malaysia, hosted an informal get together at her house. My wife and I went. She and her husband, and a couple of others from the office, and Le Bang enjoyed an afternoon together. That was the only official contact we really could have with him. This is the man, now a Foreign Minister, who pushed within the establishment as an educated, technocrat type of diplomat, to move things forward with the U.S. on the diplomatic relationship. That was only in 1990. That led the way to bring another student over from Vietnam. Increasingly, it opened the door to more and more people coming here. It wasn't just a one-way street. For example, we began permitting Fulbright scholars to go to Hanoi. It was a slow process, but it's that "people are people" thing that is so important.

Q: Well, Charlie, you mentioned the Vietnamese as the ones who were trying to get educated, going to Eastern Europe. In 1989, the whole thing fell apart. That wasn't the collapse of the Soviet Union, yet. That came in 1992. But, basically, this whole structure of Soviet control over Eastern Europe fell apart, by 1990. The Vietnamese must have been coming back and saying, "My God, this is what is happening, and the God has failed."

TWINING: I think they had mixed feelings. I think they were slow to react to those changes, in part because those changes had given them the security in which they could operate. But, on the other side of the coin, they saw those changes occurring, and they realized they probably needed to look a bit elsewhere. That was the period, in particular, that you started to have Vietnam and Laos looking toward their big neighbor, China. China had previously invaded Vietnam to punish it for going into Cambodia in 1978 and for being such an upstart. By 1990, even though unfortunately Nguyen Co Thach lost his post as Vietnam Foreign Minister because he was considered anti-Chinese, too pro-American, there was movement as the Vietnamese, in particular, and the Lao were starting to make their peace with China. That was important.

I think this was also a time they began looking more around the neighborhood. There were starting to be, as I recall, little feelers. Here, ASEAN was an international organization of six Southeast Asian countries. Yet, none of the Indochinese countries were members. The Vietnamese, in particular, saw trade benefits, and other benefits, if they became members of ASEAN.

Q: Well, we all know the story about the kids who were either coming from Vietnam as boat people or on the orderly departure program, who arrive at the age of 13, speaking no English, hitting our schools and coming out as Valedictorians. The Vietnamese have had astounding success. Was this beginning to have any political consequence, or not?



TWINING: You know, the consequence, I think, at least with Vietnam, was that the Vietnamese leadership realized that not all Vietnamese Americans were doing well, but those who were, were amassing money. This could be money that could be useful inside Vietnam. They started reaching out to what they call the Viet Kien, the overseas Vietnamese. They were in France, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. Hanoi wanted them to come back home and bring some money with them. There was the question of Vietnamese Americans sending remittances back to Vietnam. Our many meetings with the Treasury Department frequently, dealt with the issue of whether we would allow the remittances to go back. If so, how much would be allowed to go back. Then, it went from remittances to figuring out at what point you started allowing Vietnamese Americans to invest in Vietnam. The Vietnamese regime was not dumb. They just saw this milk cow.

Q: Similarly wasn't Beijing opening up to Taiwanese investment?

TWINING: I think because they saw the Chinese example and what foreign investment could do in China, they wanted not only to learn from the Chinese. They wanted to get their share, the piece of the cake, of course.

Q: What was happening? How did we see this thing? Were we at the point where we say, "A prosperous Vietnam will turn into a peaceful change in Vietnam," or was it still, "Let's keep them barefoot and pregnant?"

TWINING: Well, a lot of us felt that opening up Vietnam, both economically and politically, was a wonderful investment in the future. There were those on the other side who still by 1990 didn't quite believe that, however, which is why we had to hammer out this road map; it was so important to say to Vietnam, "If you do this, we will do this." One of the things we offered up was the end of our trade embargoes, allowing commerce and investment capital to flow back and forth. Those were things we had to offer, but we wanted the Vietnamese to do the right thing. We didn't want them to go back into Cambodia. We wanted them to leave Laos alone. We wanted their full cooperation on POW/MIA. We wanted all of these things, but that is why we had to work out this road map, just to make it clear that each had benefits that we could give to the other.

Q: Had we seen in Eastern Europe and even in the Soviet Union, long before the collapse, the demise of communist ideology? In other words, I had someone who said he was in Poland in the 1980s, and said there might be two, perhaps three dedicated Marxists in all of the country.



TWINING: I think that is absolutely right. I'd say that by 1989, except for maybe some old hands in the Vietnamese/Laos Politburos, otherwise communist ideology was already starting to be something that one now really didn't believe in. Again, I think it had to do with the crumbling of the Soviet Union, and what was happening in Eastern Europe, but it also had to do with generational change and a new generation not seeing a lot of benefit that the communist ideology had brought to it. What was commonly said was that the Vietnamese had more people dedicated and believing in communist ideology than any of the other Indochinese. The Lao had a few. In Cambodia, none of them ever understood it from day one. To me, communism was more of a way to have power, than it was something that really guided one's early action.

Q: How about June 1989, Tiananmen Square? Did that play at all? Were we feeling the reverberations, particularly in Vietnam?

TWINING: I suspect that old, hard-line communists were saying, "Well, look what happens if you open up, and you get this younger generation, which is rebelling. The Chinese did the right thing to put them down." I think the Vietnamese leadership did feel the way the Chinese government reacted was indeed the right way, squash them before it gets out of hand. Yes, I would say it had an impact. At the same time, you also had that air of belief that only opening up and receiving foreigners and foreign investment and having more equal trade around the world, and not just with the Soviet Union, which couldn't even pay for anything anymore, was important if the country was going to advance. You had both the support of the Chinese reaction, plus the feeling that one had to continue to open up. You had that together.

Q: Before we leave this, what about technology? Were the Vietnamese feeling that they were being left out? Were they anticipating what now has engulfed all of us? This is the Internet, computers.

TWINING: I think 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, was really before the computer age in Indochina. What was starting to have an impact, though, was information, not necessarily through the computer, but through economics books being translated into Vietnamese, by western economists, especially Samuelson. And more French materials were coming into Vietnam. I think that is what was having an impact, plus more interaction with the Southeast Asian countries.

Q: Was the Voice of America playing a part in the opening to the outside?



TWINING: We had active Voice of America broadcasts in Vietnamese, Lao, and Cambodian. The Voice of America had a good listenership in Vietnam. That is for sure. Therefore, you had to think that indeed it did have an impact, because every once in a while something that would be said over VOA might be seen as a signal one way or the other, rightly or wrongly, to either the government or to the population about our thinking. It would have consequences. Either the Vietnamese would let us know they didn't like us saying this kind of thing or we would have feelers from Vietnamese citizens that would come indirectly through others, asking if we really meant this. So, it had an impact.

Where VOA truly had its impact, in a way I've never seen elsewhere was in Cambodia. In the Khmer Rouge period, Cambodians weren't allowed to listen to radios. They couldn't even get batteries. I heard of people who would have two batteries for the radio, and they would keep the batteries in the sunshine to keep them alive year after year and listened to the Voice of America, in particular, then. Starting in 1979, when people could get batteries for radios in the Vietnamese era, the VOA had its strongest influence in Cambodia. It was more listened to than any other radio probably up until the early 1990s. At that time you had such an easy flow of radio broadcasts and information that VOA didn't quite have that preeminent place. But, up until 1991, before you could get any foreign newspapers in Phnom Penh, VOA was the most important source of information. I don't know how many Cambodians told me they learned English by listening to VOA, or how VOA kept them going at the time when the Vietnamese troop presence was heaviest.

Q: Well, Charlie, we'll stop here. We'll go to 1991, when you're off to Phnom Penh, and we'll talk about how that came about.

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Today is the 9th of July 2004. In 1991, what happens?

TWINING: In 1991, we had gone through the Cambodian peace process, after lots of angst and arguments and effort. Finally, we had a peace agreement for Cambodia, on October 23, 1991. I didn't attend the final ceremony because it was purely ceremonial, I instead had been brushing up my Khmer, and tried to get started on the details of reopening our mission in Phnom Penh. That took a lot more time. I had the chance to select the personnel that I wanted to go with me, to be out there with me, to make sure that all the principal personnel received Cambodian language training, at least to some degree. That was the period leading up to when I went into Phnom Penh on November 11, 1991.

Q: You were there until when?



TWINING: I stayed there until late November 1995.

Q: That was a real tour, wasn't it?

TWINING: It really was a real tour. I was the logical person to go, because I had done a year of language training 1974-75 under some talented Cambodians, then went to Bangkok for two years and spent a lot of time on the Cambodian border. Then, I went back to the Thai/Cambodian border, beginning in 1980, to deal with the refugees. I was involved in Cambodia again throughout the peace process. Nevertheless, it was difficult to leave; I had a son who was starting high school, and my other son was starting junior high school. Cambodia was a place where there were no educational facilities, except in Khmer. I had to leave my family behind for four years.

Q: In the first place, was there any problem with the Senate, as far as confirmation?

TWINING: No, the problems with the Senate were really over the peace agreement: was it favoring the Khmer Rouge? As I mentioned earlier, there the argument was, was it better to have them inside or outside the peace agreement? For me, Prince Sihanouk resolved that early on saying, "I'd much rather have them inside the tent where I can watch them, rather than outside, where they are always looking at my heels." This was an argument we had to make over and over, to skeptics on Capitol Hill, including Senator John Kerry. Once we got past the skeptics, who said, "We're going to bless this, but we are going to be watching carefully," from then on, it was okay. I didn't need Senate confirmation. I went out as Chief of Mission, and I called myself special representative, as did other ambassadors and the UN representative.

Q: I don't understand this, why weren't you going out as...

TWINING: In 1991, Cambodia was still run by the regime which the Vietnamese basically put in place in 1979. It was a regime we didn't recognize. The Cambodian peace agreement had as an internationally accepted objective that the UN operation would lead eventually to free and fair elections in Cambodia. It would be the result of those elections, the government that emerged as the result of those elections, that we would recognize, one to which we would formally accredit an ambassador. While you call yourself Chief of Mission, and you have all the perks and responsibilities, you didn't need the Senate confirmation that grants you the title of ambassador. It is a very fine distinction, and frankly in hindsight, I'm not sure it was a very important distinction, to play the game that way. But, in any case, that is how we started out. That is how all the other permanent five members started out. In the eyes of the administration, I was not an Ambassador nor a *Chargé d'Affaires*, yet I was Chief of a Diplomatic Mission. It was a very strange charade.



Q: So, this wasn't a trick to get past Senate confirmation? This was more an international diplomatic nicety?

TWINING: Yes, I guess you could call it a diplomatic nicety. It was just an issue of avoiding recognizing a government that we did not consider to be a legitimate government. How did I get by it? We were able to produce a letter for President George H. W. Bush's signature in 1991. Basically, it was a letter of accreditation, which I presented to Prince Sihanouk. We all recognized Sihanouk as the head of state. I was able to present to Sihanouk a letter accrediting me. I'm not sure he saw any difference between that letter of accreditation and a normal letter of credential. It was signed by the President of our country. In the final analysis, the distinction is not terribly different. I was frequently called ambassador. It was too complicated to explain to people this fine nicety of the situation.

Q: What about the Cambodian community in the United States, at this point? Did you have contact with them? Had these groups coalesced enough to become a player in the American political scene?

TWINING: They had coalesced enough in the U.S. At that point, they were very anti-communist. They were all anti-Khmer Rouge. They had basically left Cambodia because of the Khmer Rouge takeover, either escaping across the border, or getting out just before Cambodia fell in 1975. They were also anti-Vietnamese. Vietnam was the old traditional enemy of Cambodia. It had been eating Cambodia up by bits and pieces for a very long time, going back into the French period, and even before then. And Cambodia was now run by a regime put into place by Vietnam. They were, therefore, hostile to that regime in place. They supported the anti-communist groups vying for power in Cambodia. They were organized to the point where they made their views known to the Congress, to the President. You took those views seriously. Indeed, they were views with which we officially agreed. At the same time, we had to argue with them for the need as Prince Sihanouk said, "To get everyone inside the tent," including their enemies. These were the Phnom Penh regime and the Khmer Rouge. It was an argument we had to continue to make.

Q: Who was your DCM?

TWINING: My DCM was a good Asian specialist, a fellow adept at learning languages, including Khmer, named James Bruno. Another important player was Mark Storella, who was political officer. He, as you may recall, was the fellow who was our Asia watcher over in Embassy Paris and our link with Prince Sihanouk's party and other important Cambodians in France. He then came out as the political officer.



Q: Are they both still in the service?

TWINING: James Bruno now has retired. He had last been in Hanoi. Mark Storella is now our Deputy Chief of Mission in Phnom Penh.

Q: You went there in late 1991. Talk about what you saw in Cambodia and Phnom Penh.

TWINING: Yes, I would like to very much. I arrived on November 11, 1991. I arrived with a chap who has been a close friend of mine, Mr. Sos Kem. He had been chairman of the Cambodian language department at FSI when I was there in 1974, 1975. There were also a couple of TDY people from Bangkok, to help us get going.

When we arrived in Phnom Penh on a Thai commercial flight, we had no idea what kind of reception we would have. This was, after all, a place run by a regime with which we didn't even exchange a word of greeting, during all the Paris negotiations, and the negotiations in Beijing, Jakarta, and with whom we ended up getting peace in Cambodia. We never spoke to them. Again, you have to question the wisdom of that, but there were people at the White House and others who were very conservative, who felt that we shouldn't give one inch to these Vietnamese puppets, as they were thought to be, which wasn't the case. We arrived in Phnom Penh November 11, two and a half weeks after the signing of the Paris peace accords. Again, we didn't know what reception we would get. There were journalists taking my picture. I was on the front page of The New York Times. There was a Foreign Ministry representative there to greet me, Americas chief Theam Chuny, waiting in the old airport VIP room with a frayed carpet. You realized just seeing that VIP room what the state of Cambodia probably looked like. But it was interesting coming into Phnom Penh because there was only one hotel in Phnom Penh, the Cambodian. Embassy Bangkok had sent over a fax asking for reservations, but the hotel never received the fax.

Suddenly Cambodia was the story of the hour. Again, recovery from genocide, all this kind of thing, really gets the juices flowing. There were 400 journalists in Phnom Penh. There were all the other embassies coming in to get set up. An Australian military element had just arrived to help set up UNAMIC [United Nations Advance Mission in Cambodia] which was to prepare for the arrival of the peacekeeping operation. We came in from the airport. Someone had lined up a car for us to get into. We saw this city, which had not at all recovered from 1975, when it was emptied out by the Khmer Rouge, no maintenance no anything.



We arrived at this hotel, full of all these foreigners, from all these different groups. There was no room at the inn, whatsoever. We didn't know what to do. Finally, the hotel was able to make room for a couple of us. That hotel is where I lived for two years. What was good about the hotel was that if you needed to get word to a UN official in the middle of the night, in case of a crisis, or if you needed to contact the French ambassador at some point, it was so easy to knock on the door, or slip a note under the door. You would see each other at breakfast. It was almost incestuous, but it was a good way to operate. The bad part was the journalists all knew where you stayed, too, and your door would be knocked on at all hours. In that first flurry, you had CNN, all the important media in the world, which descended on Phnom Penh.

My arrival on the 11th was followed four days later by the arrival of Prince Sihanouk. The Phnom Penh authorities tried to get the royal palace, which had become decrepit as well, in some kind of shape, for Sihanouk. Of course, Sihanouk's arrival received lots more attention. The last time Sihanouk was in the country was when he was in there as a symbol for the Khmer Rouge, but as he called it, he was under "palace arrest" the whole time. He was a symbol, but in name and image only. He had no authority. He had lost 15 children and grandchildren to the Khmer Rouge slaughter or to disease. He had very bittersweet memories himself about coming back. But, like any other Cambodian, he was thrilled to set foot again on Cambodian soil. It was a very exciting period of time. I presented my own credentials to Sihanouk four days later, i.e., the letter from Bush. The Prince and I had had a relationship during his time in exile, when we would consult with him and his party on the peace process.

The credentials ceremony November 19, 1991 was the beginning of a very strong relationship with Sihanouk, who proved to be indispensable, almost as an umbrella for the peace process. Every Cambodian would look up to that umbrella; even the Khmer Rouge had to respect him. The Cambodian instinctive respect for the king was virtually universal. Sihanouk and his presence enabled us, despite daily challenges to the peace agreement, to restore peace to Cambodia, because no one in the final analysis would stand up to Sihanouk. His instincts were good instincts. He told me frequently, "You know, I made many mistakes in my past." He would often refer to the U.S./Cambodian relationship, of course, which was terrible during the 1960s. But, I would say, "Your Royal Highness, we all make mistakes." He said, "No, believe me, I made more mistakes, and I have to live with that for the rest of my life." Sihanouk was an interesting person to deal with, and he proved to be a valuable and indispensable player in the whole peace process.

Q: What was the government plan when you arrived there? How did you deal with it?



TWINING: As I said, coming into town, you saw the city, which had deteriorated. Phnom Penh used to be considered a pearl. Phnom Penh, in the early 1960s, was probably much nicer than Singapore in the early 1960s. But Phnom Penh had deteriorated badly just like the rest of the country. The regime running the country had no money to fix up anything. It was hanging on by the skin of its teeth. I had to decide early on what my own relations would be with the Phnom Penh regime.

There were those in Washington who felt strongly that I shouldn't talk to its officials, I shouldn't be seen with them. I felt, "My heaven, I was there. They were part of the peace agreement, so we had to deal with these people." Honestly, we found people almost hungry for attention. We didn't have to give them much attention, at first. For example, we might need only to complain about roadblocks outside the city. You were not going to respect those roadblocks. You were there as a representative of the United States. With the Cambodian peace agreement, you had the right to go anywhere you wanted in the country. If it was only to tell them this, they welcomed your coming in and telling them this. This was a regime that was maybe two deep in a ministry, that is to say those people who really had any ability to make decisions, any knowledge of how to run a government. You realized that you needed to work with them. Again, they were party to the Cambodian peace agreement. You realized you could help bring them along to respect the terms of the peace agreement. So, that was the way I decided we had to work things. Indeed, my point of view won out.

Q: As I get it, Sihanouk was the king, the head of government, at that time, or not?

TWINING: No. Under the Cambodian peace accords, we established an idea that came from my office, I think, more than anywhere else. That is something called the Supreme National Council. We were saying that the Phnom Penh regime would be in charge initially until the UN operation came in full force, continuing to administer the great majority of the country. The Khmer Rouge administered their little areas of the country. The non-communist groups administered their tiny areas of the country. In reality, 95% of the country was in the hands of the Phnom Penh regime. So, we said each group can administer its part of the country, but the Supreme National Council would be constituted as the overall governing body of Cambodia. On the Supreme National Council were the four Cambodian parties, two non-communist, the Khmer Rouge, and the Phnom Penh authorities. Also present were the five permanent members of the Security Council. The UN special representative also had a seat the most important among foreigners at the table.

Prince Sihanouk was chairman of the Supreme National Council. He was head of state, not head of government. We basically said there was no government. The Supreme National Council was to make rules for Cambodia and to work with the UN, and coordinate with the rest of us, the activities leading to peace and elections in Cambodia. We did not recognize any government per se, during that period.



Q: The prime minister, I guess, was?

TWINING: Hun Sen was Prime Minister of the Phnom Penh regime (formally, the State of Cambodia) at that time, and is today Prime Minister of the Royal Government of Cambodia.

Q: Who had been there for a very long time.

TWINING: Since 1979. Since he came in, behind the Vietnamese troops, although he first served as Foreign Minister at age 28, if I remember correctly.

Q: How important when you arrived there was Vietnamese influence?

TWINING: That's a very good question. I found myself thinking about that this morning. The view outside Cambodia was that the Vietnamese continued to run Cambodia, that the Vietnamese had made some dramatic withdrawals of troops but still had troops hidden in Cambodia. There was also the view that they pulled the strings of the Phnom Penh regime. They told them what to do.

However, as I mentioned before, there was the view of then Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach that a Vietnamese Can't tell a Cambodian what to do, because they will react and do just the opposite. Cambodians do have a visceral reaction to anything Vietnamese. Still, the Vietnamese had influence. People like Hun Sen and almost his entire regime had basically fled Cambodia, either before or during the Khmer Rouge period, to save their lives.

Q: Fled to Vietnam?



TWINING: I'm sorry, had fled to Vietnam, from Cambodia. Even many of them had been in the Khmer Rouge, like Hun Sen. But the Khmer Rouge was always turning in on themselves, and these people had to flee for their lives. They owed something to Vietnam, for allowing them to stay and organize a resistance with Vietnamese help, to come into Cambodia. So, there was a natural inclination to work with the Vietnamese and at least to listen to the Vietnamese. An important duty for the UN, more than we initially realized, was that as it came increasingly into Cambodia, especially with the full-fledged UN operation called UNTAC, the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia, which arrived February/March 1992, it had to be alert to each and every rumor of Vietnamese presence anywhere. Were there Vietnamese advisors in a ministry? It had to investigate that. Were there Vietnamese troops hidden in the rubber plantations of eastern Cambodia? It had to investigate that. Indeed, the investigation turned out, without exception, to show there were no Vietnamese sitting in the shadows of Cambodia, despite many Cambodian preconceptions to the contrary.

Q: Did you get the feeling that the Vietnamese had had enough of this too? I think it's one of these things where they were thinking that they were stuck, and all they wanted to do was get the hell out.

TWINING: Absolutely. This was very true in Cambodia. The Vietnamese would confide in you that it had been so difficult working there. I had heard of Vietnamese advisors who had been in ministries, up until 1989, early 1990. They made it no secret to their colleagues in ministry X that they were happy to go home. You heard it over and over. But, again, this had to be proven to the world, including to people in Washington, that the Vietnamese had indeed left.

Q: So, what were you there for?

TWINING: We diplomats, the permanent five, the ASEAN ambassadors, Australia, Japan, Germany, were all there to support the UN operation in Cambodia, and to make sure the Cambodians respected the peace agreement that the UN was there to implement. Frankly, every day was a challenge. Every day, something would happen where you had to weigh in with one player or the other. The only group I could not talk to, was not allowed to talk to, was the Khmer Rouge. That was simply verboten. That meant if we wanted to make sure we conveyed a message to the Khmer Rouge, I had to work through the Chinese, basically. Sometimes through the UN, but especially the Chinese. That is why it was so important for the permanent five to be in place. There was one day we were together five times during the day, for different meetings, because of different crisis. We were always together, as the five permanent members of the Security Council, the five ambassadors in Phnom Penh.

We had to work with the ASEAN diplomats, as well. They, too, had their entree into the parties, so we established something called the core group. The perm five, the main ASEAN...



Q: The main five again were?

TWINING: The U.S., U.K, France, the Soviet Union, and China. So, we five ambassadors also formed a core group together with the main ASEAN ambassadors, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, the main ASEANS, because we had to make sure that we coordinated our approach on Cambodian issues. There were often times we would feel strongly about bringing in the Vietnamese and the Lao, and did so. We wanted to make sure Cambodia's neighbors, plus Thailand of course, were also involved in any decisions, and weighing in. It was important. The Vietnamese ambassador and I maintained close relations, establishing a dialogue we both found very useful. This was the way we worked things.

Again, there were so frequently crises. One crisis that arose early on was on November 27, 1991. The Khmer Rouge finally, a couple of days earlier, sent two important people to Phnom Penh to become part of the SNC. One was a so-called acting President Khieu Samphan, another was a military general named Son Sen. Two days later, they were viciously attacked in the house they had rented. Indeed, Mark Storella and I went over to the area. We had no relations with them, but something was happening, and we wanted to see what it was. We stood outside. A mob was attacking the Khmer Rouge leaders, who frankly were there to help carry out the peace agreement. We wanted them to carry out the peace agreement. People were up in a tree watching. The tree started to topple over. It was a small tree, and it fell partly on me. People had invaded the Khmer Rouge house. The next thing I saw was a bloodied Khieu Samphan and Son Sen coming out of the house, under some protection of the Phnom Penh regime, to get into a car, and get out of there.

We were very suspicious. What was really happening? Why was this mob suddenly going after the Khmer Rouge? Was it a spontaneous thing? I was convinced it wasn't a spontaneous thing. Indeed, I heard afterward from a close friend of mine, who had been on the roof of his apartment building, close by, that he spotted people with walkie talkies, saying, "Tell them to advance now," or "Wait, keep them back." These were people from the Phnom Penh regime managing this "demonstration". I am confident that was true. They are the ones who finally rescued the Khmer Rouge when it had gone far enough. This demonstration was hardly a positive move and influenced what happened next.



The Khmer Rouge left Phnom Penh immediately. That was the end of the peace agreement for the moment. The Khmer Rouge started to act out on the battlefield again. They began to shoot at UN helicopters, UN vehicles. It became a bad time. This resulted from a serious miscalculation on the part of, I'm convinced, the Phnom Penh regime. For months, Sihanouk and others, the Chinese, worked to cajole the Khmer Rouge to reenter the peace process. The crisis lasted for six months. Note that an important part of the peace agreement was to get the armies of all four parties to come into cantonment camps and disarm, prior to demobilization. The non-communists were willing participants. The Phnom Penh regime was less willing. It started to bring in some guys with arms that were so antiquated you wondered where the real arms were. When it was obvious the Khmer Rouge were no longer involved and didn't send troops into cantonment, then the Phnom Penh regime stopped playing ball, based on that. So, it really had bad effects. The entire cantonment, disarmament, and demobilization process was a failure. There was no longer any confidence.

The UN, the UN special representative for UNTAC arrived in early 1992, Mr. Yasushi Akashi of Japan, a UN career official. The diplomatic role, and Akashi's role, was still to try to get all the Cambodians to work together. If they didn't work together, if we didn't have a semblance of peace in the country, how could we have free and fair elections? We finally, by hook and by crook, got the Khmer Rouge back into the process, but without significant change to the military equation. We realized in hindsight that the UN operation should have been a Chapter 7 operation. It was a Chapter 6 operation.

Q: What is the difference?

TWINING: The difference is: Chapter 6 is for peaceful settlement of disputes. You get peacekeeping troops (in Cambodia we had 16,000 for heaven's sakes), but they cannot use their weapons at all except in self-defense. Chapter 7 is a more aggressive way of operating to ensure peace. That is what we have had to have in places in Africa. The peacekeeping force is more assertive. It's not just a question of keeping two parties separated; it's a question of enforcing UN decisions. Akashi, on the day he left Cambodia in August 1993, told me at the airport, "We should have had Chapter 6 ½." We didn't need to be completely assertive, to enforce UN decisions, but we needed to have more ability to use force than we had under Chapter 6. Personally, I believe the Security Council adopted Chapter 6 because potential troop contributors did not want to take casualties. Indeed, a senior UN official told me that officials of six of the twelve troop contributors told him outright, "no casualties," during the organizational negotiations in New York.



That was the weakness, because it meant the UN could not enforce the agreement when it came to cantonment, disarmament, and demobilization. It meant that the UN, which sent people into each ministry of the Phnom Penh regime to exercise control couldn't enforce its decisions. If it was supposed to run the Ministry of Interior, run the police, in reality it couldn't enforce its, or SNC, decisions. It meant that the Hun Sen regime continued to have a leg up, to administer Cambodia, basically. This was a real weakness, due not to the peace agreement but to UNSC decisions for implementation.

On the other hand, we had to make things work as best we could with those tools we had. That included Prince Sihanouk weighing in with the individual parties to make them play the game according to the rules of the peace agreement. It was just a very dynamic time. What it led to, finally, was a UN run election. The UN normally just oversees elections, but on May 23, 1993, it actually ran the elections. It organized the elections in Cambodia. That was a key date. It remains a key date, because the elections chose members of a constituent assembly to write a constitution. That assembly then turned itself into a national assembly, party representation the basis for forming an internationally recognized government. Those elections were so important.

Up until that time, the Khmer Rouge hadn't really decided how to play the game. We got them back on the Supreme National Council but they refused to participate in the election. I was under instruction to avoid the Khmer Rouge, to the point where I couldn't even shake their hands, if they were facing me in a receiving line. Once at the Royal Palace, Khieu Samphan and Son Sen hid behind a potted plant to avoid our mutual embarrassment. Later, Khieu Samphan said to me, "Mr. Ambassador, this is ridiculous."

Q: Who was Khieu Samphan?

TWINING: He was the putative president of the Khmer Rouge or Democratic Kampuchea, as it was called formally. He was a member of the Supreme National Council. Cambodia used English, French, and Khmer. I used each language about a third of the time. He said to me one day in French, when he was in a receiving line, with Sihanouk and the other Cambodians on the SNC, "Mr. Ambassador, this is ridiculous. Let's at least shake hands." I said, "You're right, it's ridiculous." At least, I shook hands with the man. But I was forbidden to engage in substantive meetings with him.

Q: I'm almost worried about this, as far as diplomatic relations. When the going gets tough, we withdraw our most experienced person in a country, i.e., the ambassador, to show disapproval. The whole system is almost designed to create a breach, rather than to heal a breach, by telling people they can't do what they are supposed to do.



TWINING: I agree with you 100%. We always need to maintain contact. If you withdraw the ambassador, for God's sake, keep a chargé d'affaires, and vice versa for the other party. Whether it's Western Sahara, an independence movement, or some other element we don't recognize, we still should be able to talk to them. It was absolutely true in Cambodia with the Khmer Rouge, as well, in my view.

Q: This is tape five, side one, with Charlie Twining. Were the perm five all in agreement? I'm thinking of the Soviets and the French veering off in a different direction.

TWINING: You know, I guess what had happened before we went into Cambodia, was important. We had the Paris conference in 1989. We then had perm five meetings. We also had meetings together with ASEAN, all leading up to November 1991. In the course of those meetings, often the people were the same people. For example, the Chinese ambassador and the Soviet ambassador had been in every single meeting with me, along the way. From 1989, 1990, 1991. We knew each other well. We were used to going back and forth. The French and the British ambassadors were new, but the French and the Indonesians had co-chaired the entire peace process. Because of that, our relations with the French and Indonesians - Ali Alatas was the Indonesia Foreign Minister, and Roland Dumas the French Foreign Minister, and the people at the Quai d'Orsay - our relations were very close. We had worked together so much. So, once we were in Phnom Penh, we had gotten over the threshold of national arguments, if you will.

By that time, the Chinese realized that being tied to the Khmer Rouge was doing them no good. The world had changed. The Khmer Rouge were a part of history they didn't want to bother with any longer. They were opening up to the non-communist Cambodians. They were opening up to others in the world, not to mention the United States. The Soviet Union had Vietnam and the Phnom Penh regime incumbent like a yoke around its neck. They had been supporting these people. They were no longer in a position to support anybody. They couldn't support themselves. So, they themselves wanted to deal in a much more macro way on Cambodia. We found a genuine solidarity in viewing Cambodia. It really made it much easier to work together, to get an agreed point of view, as we worked with the Cambodians and worked with the UN. Indeed, the UN and we five ended up working so easily together. It really was a remarkable process. Had we not all worked together on the peace agreement, I think we would have continued to wage our little battles in Cambodia.

Q: Akashi is Japanese, right?

TWINING: Yes.



Q: How did you judge him?

TWINING: Akashi had a difficult role. Here was a man who was a professional UN civil servant. With any civil servant, there is a certain amount of cautiousness as you move forward in the world. He became head of a peacekeeping operation of 16,000 soldiers, 3,000 police, 3,000 civilians, a total of 22,000 people. This was the largest peacekeeping operation the UN ever had, the first peacekeeping operation that was so comprehensive in approach. The refugee part of it, the developmental, rehabilitation part of it, the taking over, theoretically, of a government, and trying to run the administration of Cambodia. He was dealing with this terrible rebel group, the Khmer Rouge, which part of the time wasn't even open to dealing with the UN. It was very tough for Akashi.

At the same time, Mr. Akashi had a very difficult Secretary General of the UN, Boutros-Ghali. The UN organization itself was not organized to support a comprehensive peacekeeping operation. Akashi went back to the UN saying, "I've got to have visa specialists who can work with the Cambodian Foreign Ministry, visa people to make sure visas are given out in a non-partisan fashion to people." Passports were to be given, not just to the Phnom Penh regime people, but they also had to be given to the non-communists and the Khmer Rouge. The UN said, "We don't have any visa specialists." Akashi said, "It's part of the peace agreement that we will have people specialized in all kinds of government functions", and he insisted that New York had to come up with people who had the needed areas of specialization. The UN was very slow on logistics. It wasn't prepared to handle the logistical demands. Again, Boutros-Ghali also had very fixed views on things.

Q: Madeleine Albright was responsible for our opposing his reelection. But, personally, was this a real problem?

TWINING: Personally, he was a nice individual. I met with him at various times. He would meet with the perm five when he would come to Cambodia. We would sometimes go to New York. He was personally a nice man, but he had very fixed views. Akashi, for example, early on said, "You know, all there is right now is state radio. We have to find a way to get news out to Cambodians that is unvarnished by ideological input, such as the state of Cambodia, the Phnom Penh regime puts into it." These efforts to try to take over state radio finally had some success, but it took a long time. He said, "The UN needs its own radio." Boutros-Ghali said, "The UN doesn't have radio stations." Akashi said, "I think this is the only way we can get out to the public what is happening." Boutros-Ghali opposed it until maybe late 1992. Finally, Akashi wore him down. He said, "Well, alright."



UN radio was one of the biggest successes it had in Cambodia, because otherwise, where were Cambodians getting their news? Mainly, from VOA. Now, every UN peacekeeping operation, to my knowledge, has a UN radio station. Akashi had to wear down Boutros-Ghali. I give him a lot of credit. My main criticism of Akashi came when... He knows it; we talked about it over and over. One day, Akashi and his military commander, a wonderful Australian General named John Sanderson, decided they would go into the Khmer Rouge area. This is sometime during the first half of 1992. They wanted to assert UN authority, but they also wanted to talk to the Khmer Rouge. The Khmer Rouge put a bamboo pole across their highway. Akashi and Sanderson said, "We cannot force our way in. We're Chapter 6, we cannot force our way in." Well, I reacted very strongly. Others did, too.

Some of the non-communist Cambodians said, "My gosh, you go into our territory, you mean you won't go into theirs?" Hun Sen also reacted. I reacted very strongly by saying, "This is a place where you should have forced your way in." Again, both of them told me, "We did not consider that to be in our mandate." It showed something to the Khmer Rouge regarding UN weakness, something the UN could never overcome with the Khmer Rouge. Of course, it's a judgment call, and I could see their point of view. I just felt it was the wrong call at the time. Akashi was a very good man. He tried his best. He would get caught between competing agendas of the Cambodians and Prince Sihanouk, who felt he was still the sovereign of Cambodia. No one should tell him what to do. I believe that Boutros-Ghali and the UN organization should have been more responsive than they were, or than they could have been. I give him credit for doing as much as he did.

Q: In a way, I can see it must have been difficult for you, being an American, who is proactive. If you need a radio, for God's sake, put up a radio. But, also seeing the garbage not being collected, or something. Did you almost have to sit on your hands to keep from getting involved in what amounts to nation building? Were you there as a consultant, for this government? You weren't out to do anything outside of that? Were you just part of this consultant apparatus or were you able to get out and do things?

TWINING: It was somewhere in between. I was doing all the above. Theoretically, you were there as a diplomat, and you did nice diplomatic things, and went to cocktail parties, if you will. But that wasn't getting the job done. It was obvious from day one you had to be proactive. You had to be proactive, diplomatically, but you also realized that the garbage needed to be picked up, if you will. A multi-faction regime had almost no ability to pick up the garbage. Phnom Penh, in 1991, was garbage strewn. Squatters were living in the majority of the buildings. It was really in bad shape. Our job was to make sure the people charged with carrying out tasks, carried them out. Therefore, we pressed the UN. "Okay, you inserted people into the governor's office of Phnom Penh. You have to try to give them the resources and the support they need to make sure the garbage gets picked up."



Finally, I think it was the UN, or it may have been another country, because of the pressures about garbage, which gave some garbage trucks to Phnom Penh. The UN and the Cambodians in Phnom Penh made sure those garbage trucks moved. That they had gas to move, and the like. You needed to stay on top of these things. You had to press to make sure things were done, when necessary. You also had another tool. That was your own aid program. The UN tried to coordinate all assistance, at least for the rehabilitation of Cambodia. UNDP was a strong player, the strongest of the UN specialized agencies in Cambodia. You had considerable coordination with UNDP to make sure things got done. It was similarly aware of the need to have the garbage picked up.

At the same time we, the French, and others, had our own bilateral aid programs to use for institution building, or use to help with infrastructure, or to use in support of non-government organizations. Your aid programs would help support the overall objectives that you were there to meet. You tried to coordinate these things as best you could. The main thing was to get the people responsible for getting things done, doing so.

Q: For the person who reads this, I said, "garbage." It's an example, but it's a generic term, meaning, lights, and electricity, whatever you're talking about.

TWINING: Good.

Q: But, did we go in there with an AID program? Did we have AID people or was that to come later?

TWINING: No. We brought in an AID program, not long after I took over. My office had worked with counterparts in AID Washington for almost two years previously in thinking through what AID might do after a peace settlement. AID wisely had set aside funds in its budget. The AID program wasn't large, but it was large enough. We decided we needed to support some of the things that UN agencies were doing. We couldn't give support to the Phnom Penh regime. But we could support NGO development, for example. When I went into Cambodia, basically there were no NGOs. Cambodians didn't have non-governmental organizations.



Early on, we started using our AID program to bring in the American Red Cross, for example. Catholic Relief Service was there doing some things on the international side. The international NGOs needed support. We insisted that the Phnom Penh regime had to allow local NGOs to get started. I give Akashi a great deal of credit, because once he got there, he felt, too, that NGOs were an awfully important tool in democratic and other development. One of the things the U.S. did, for example, when NGOs started up, was support a project to train paralegal people who would stand up in courts to help defend Cambodians, the Cambodian Defenders Project. There was no way of Cambodians defending themselves, in tribunals, which were pretty puny tribunals to begin with. So, we looked for ways like this to help Cambodia get going.

I must admit I was overjoyed, when by the time I left Cambodia, toward the end of 1995, there were at least 400 Cambodian indigenous NGOs. When I happened to go back in 2001, there were more than ever. Nobody any longer knew how many there were. NGOs provided important ways to get things done. You assisted local NGOs and budding political parties by supporting efforts by the National Democratic Institute and the International Republican Institute to do training of Cambodians. How do you do financing? How do you organize how to run for elections? There were other efforts to help with local development and human rights.

Q: Did you have a real embassy? Were there political officers, things like that?

TWINING: I'll never forget. Early on, we had a wonderful secretary come from Bangkok to become our secretary at the U.S. mission, which is what we called it, Eunhee Aruizu. I remember we had staff meetings sitting on her bed in the Cambodiana hotel. We had at first a communicator with a satellite communications device. We had an admin person who came over from Bangkok before replacing him with our own, Jim Derrick. We started to form a small nucleus of an embassy. Before we left Washington, I had to do a memo to Lawrence Eagleburger, who at that point was Deputy Secretary of State, getting approval for slots to set up the embassy, the mission. Eagleburger said, "Look, we want to keep this a very small embassy. All agencies together should never total more than 10 people." I thought it was nice, but I didn't think it was realistic. You're talking about other agencies, AID coming in alone would be several people. In any case, those were our marching orders. We lined up a DCM, political officer, consular officer, economic officer, a secretary, and an admin officer, as the core. AID sent in at first a TDY AID officer, then a permanent director, Lee Twentyman. Mr. Kem Sos stayed on as special assistant. Captain Rich Arant started a POW/MIA office.



Well, that is how we began. Then it started to grow. Obviously this core of a U.S. mission became the core of an embassy. By the end of 1991, we were fully staffed. The people who had been in Cambodian language training, which again I insisted upon because you needed it if only to order a meal, a bowl of soup, arrived. Those who came from Bangkok, such as the secretary, studied Cambodian in Phnom Penh. Things began growing. We needed AID people to implement the program. You couldn't rely on Bangkok. We needed regular administrative staff to do things. You couldn't rely on Bangkok.

When we first opened up, soon after I got there, Embassy Bangkok sent over a couple of vehicles that it was going to dispose of in a sale. All we could do was try to keep them running, but they were better than nothing. That was the way we got started. I had to make a decision early on about where to put an embassy. In fact, an advance team was sent out to look at the building situation before I arrived. I decided, and my view held, that the old American embassy, a big white building which the Cambodian fisheries service occupied after 1979, was such a symbol of the pre-Khmer Rouge period, located right in the heart of Phnom Penh and a good place for demonstrations to occur, was inappropriate. We didn't want to go back to this facility. The fisheries service was in it; let them have it. The large building would have cost a fortune to repair.

Eagleburger said he wanted 10 people, and I said, "Fine." I wanted to get a small building hidden off the main streets, where we could have an embassy. I didn't want a place that would facilitate hostile demonstrations. I didn't want a place that symbolized the war years. So, this is what we did. We found a little villa, which was fixed up as our mission headquarters. The key day was in the spring of 1992, when we raised the American flag over that villa, and made it the U.S. mission. After the elections, it later became the U.S. embassy. Since then, we have outgrown the space. Staff members kept increasing. USIA came in. Before our opening, the Defense Department said it didn't need an attaché in Phnom Penh, and then it was clamoring to get in a year later. Now the U.S. is building a brand new embassy in Phnom Penh, because we have outgrown that villa, and the other villa nearby, attached to it. That is how we started out in Phnom Penh with the U.S. mission.

Q: How about instructions from Washington? Were you given relatively free reign, because it doesn't sound like the sort of thing... You know, if you're consulting at a hotel at night with other missions, it's a pretty fast-moving town.

TWINING: I guess that was the beauty. You didn't have very good communication. You had a little piece of equipment that could shoot out short messages and receive short messages. Maybe that was just right, because honestly, this was such a new kind of hotel room operation. I had to decide what I was going to call myself, as a title. The State Department couldn't make up its mind what to call me. As I mentioned earlier, I called myself U.S. Special Representative and our office was the U.S. Mission. None of this fit easily into the State "mold".



It struck me, moreover, that State didn't always have to know everything we were doing, how we were doing things. State had to know what we needed, in terms of support. State had to know how compliance with the peacekeeping agreement was going on. State had to know how the UN was doing, because we were paying one-third of the bill. I knew the basic guidelines about the Khmer Rouge. I interpreted more flexibly the guidelines about dealing with the Phnom Penh regime because it was a reality we had to deal with. We had to make a lot of decisions on the run, if you will, and tell State about them afterward. State was supportive. I don't criticize State or the White House. They basically had confidence in those of us on the ground. We just made sure we had enough communication to keep that confidence. Also, I came back every three months for a week, partly to see the family, but also it was a chance to consult. I would see the Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs. I would see the Assistant Secretary of State. I would see NSC, the Pentagon, AID. It was important to maintain dialogue.

We started getting visits too. The more visits you had, whether it was Senator McCain, or Senator Kerry, or Senator Bob Smith, or the POW/MIA people, or people from the administration, or key staffers from Capitol Hill, the more they realized the conditions under which we were working. You tried to get them out of Phnom Penh. Again, I made a point early on that we had freedom of travel. You didn't take your life in your hands by going into the Khmer Rouge areas; the Khmer Rouge were not a friendly party to the United States. In most other places, if you could get over the hellish roads, you could get out and about. You realized you needed to get visitors out and about. Of course, a lovely benefit of being in Cambodia was Angkor Wat.

I went to Siem Reap where Angkor is located. Often, I took visitors there. In 1991, Angkor was empty. There would be nobody else there. It was spooky. There were some guards around, military personnel from the Phnom Penh regime. A guard would be guarding the big temple of Angkor Wat. It was one guy with a little AK-47. Khmer Rouge were not far away. They would come in at night sometimes. You had to watch out for cobras because the place was grown up in high grass. Angkor was a lovely place to visit. I never saw all the hundreds of ruins. Every time I went, I tried to see one more. But I could never see them all. It was great seeing one of the wonders of the world. Again, you wanted to get visitors there, and we did.

Cambodia was not just a war torn, decrepit country; it did have a proud history and culture. You wanted to enjoy these at the same time that you were trying to make sure that peace was restored. Our secret goal, we, the British, the French, was to defang and get rid of the Khmer Rouge. In the final analysis, that is what happened in Cambodia.



I should talk a little about the Khmer Rouge. Again, they themselves never quite knew how to react to the peace agreement. Pol Pot, the head of the Khmer Rouge, was an isolated figure. He himself may have made the decisions, but he was not where it was happening. Even some people in the Khmer Rouge who were in Phnom Penh didn't tell Pol Pot everything they were doing, I suspect. The group had isolated itself from the peace process. Once their two key individuals were attacked soon after the peace process began, the Khmer Rouge isolated themselves for six months, as we noted, and their participation remained uneven after that.

In some places, they would cooperate with the UN. There was a place in western Cambodia, Thmar Puok, where there were some Australian police officials. I give them full credit. They were in a non-communist area, but the Khmer Rouge were five kilometers nearby. The Australians started reaching out to the Khmer Rouge about working together. By gosh, the local Khmer Rouge said, "Yes, okay." I remember going into this area that the Australians helped open up, one where the Khmer Rouge had strong influence, and going by a guard shack. The Khmer Rouge guards would look at me and I would look at them. I would keep driving. They would go back to sitting down. You always wondered how much Khmer Rouge central authorities controlled their local cadres. You wondered that during the Khmer Rouge era, as well as even when I was there. The Australians, in little Thmar Puok were able to get the police of all four factions to sit down and work together. That was really an accomplishment.

On the other hand, the Khmer Rouge sometimes made it clear that they had force they could command. One day Australian Ambassador John Holloway and I were in Thmar Puok. Suddenly, we were surrounded by 300-armed Khmer Rouge. They were carrying signs like, "Down with the peace agreement," and "Down with the West," things like that. We didn't know how to react. We were by ourselves. There was nobody protecting us, whatsoever. We were in a car. We decided that we couldn't do anything so we would keep going in the middle of 300 Khmer Rouge soldiers, demonstrating against us. At one point, the Australian ambassador got out of the car and told a marcher that he wanted to buy one of the signs. I think it said, "Down with Australia," or something. The Khmer Rouge guy said, "Meet me around the corner afterward." They were showing their strength, but at the same time, they didn't know how to deal with us.

To us, a key issue was whether the Khmer Rouge would participate in the elections? All of us, the UN first and foremost, Sihanouk, everyone encouraged the Khmer Rouge to participate. "Bring some candidates into areas where you are. Let them stand for elections." They had been indecisive for months, which showed they didn't know what to do. They finally said, "No," and you wonder if that wasn't a real mistake for them.



On election day, May 23, 1993, we found the Khmer Rouge villages also wanted to go and vote. They had to come out of the Khmer Rouge areas, walk into non-Khmer Rouge areas and go to the ballot box. You heard stories about them not knowing what to do. You started hearing, mid-morning, of the Khmer Rouge spreading the word to villagers, "Don't vote, don't vote. We don't want you in it." It was too late. One Cambodian woman told me she saw a whole village walking down the road in northwestern Cambodia to go to vote. She said to them, "Where are you going?" "We're all going to vote." "Do your leaders want you to vote?" They said, "We're going to vote anyway." We realized the Khmer Rouge was crumbling. That was a good sign. Had they participated in the process, maybe it would have been different. But at that point, they were losing control of people, and they never regained it.

Q: Did anybody talk about what was the ideology of the Khmer Rouge? I gather it came out of the French intellectual stuff in Paris in the 1920s, or something, and turned septic. Did you get a feel for the forces at the time?

TWINING: It was a strange combination. I would see the Khmer Rouge coming out of the cold, if you will. This was in 1993 and onward. Whole Khmer Rouge units would say, "We're tired of living in the forest. We want to come in." Their families wanted to come in and be normal people again. You would see these people who were illiterate farm boys and illiterate farm girls. That was it. Yet, whom did they have in Phnom Penh? They had these educated people. Khieu Samphan, the putative leader of the Khmer Rouge had a Ph.D. I read his dissertation, from France. Pol Pot had also studied in France but failed his exams twice. He never finished. Yet, he was the leader of the Khmer Rouge. These were pseudo-intellectuals, I would call them, who were seized by the writings of Jean Paul Sartre and Marx. There is a place on the Left Bank of Paris where they and their comrades would gather on Sunday afternoons and talk about the dialectic and Cambodia when they were students in the early 1950s. I went to see it once. These were mostly people who really never learned very much about the real world. They were all caught up in this funny ideology. Pol Pot worked in a commune in Yugoslavia one summer, for example.



I mentioned earlier that in 1967 there was a peasant uprising in a place called Samlaut in western Cambodia. Because the villagers were getting less for their rice than before under Sihanouk's regime, they couldn't live on that amount. The Khmer Rouge, the pseudo-intellectuals who had been in Paris in the early 1950s, asserted leadership over such peasant sentiment - that they were being treated unfairly - in western Cambodia and far northeastern Cambodia. You had this "marriage" of the two groups that lasted throughout the whole period of the Khmer Rouge, the uneducated and the pseudo-intellectuals. That is the way it went. Finally, I was convinced that the Khmer Rouge leadership, however much they may have believed in the early 1950s in the ideology, by the 1970s it was simply a way of seizing and holding onto power. That's all. They used these people. They used the appeal of King Sihanouk. In 1970, he was so irritated at the Lon Nol coup that he called upon people to rise up and support him, and they could do so by supporting the Khmer Rouge, another mistake he acknowledges he made. They used all of this to get people to rally to the Khmer Rouge, but supporters were mostly rural people who probably had a sense of grievance, but also didn't know any better.

Q: You were there when the Soviet Union came apart. Did that have any effect?

TWINING: I suppose it had an effect. Soviet Ambassador Yuri Myakotnykh became the Russian ambassador, but he had no money to fund his embassy anymore. What he did was very clever. Aeroflot still flew into Phnom Penh from Moscow. He took all the Aeroflot receipts and used them to pay for running the embassy. He was thus able to maintain a facade of a normal embassy operation. I remember well, he acknowledged by telling me, "You know, in the past, they were always so accustomed to getting aid from us, we have no more aid to give them." You felt embarrassed for him. As you sat in donor coordination meetings, each of us would say what we were doing, and what we intended to do, and how it all supported the overall objectives. The Russian would sit there and say, "I'm sorry, we have nothing we can do right now," except to try to continue to support any Cambodian students studying in Russia so they didn't starve to death. That was about it. You felt sorry for them.

The Cambodians were not fools. They realized that their "Big Brother" who had been helping them during the 1980s, no longer was there to help them anymore. That helped them shift to looking much more at increasing ties with Asia, and developing ties with the West.

Q: Did the United States have any attraction to Cambodians, or were they really looking toward ASEAN and China?



TWINING: They were probably looking toward us more than toward ASEAN, at first. We kept saying, "Look, it's healthy to look at ASEAN. They're your immediate neighbors. They're the ones you need to trade with, to have political relationships with." I don't want to exaggerate VOA's influence, but it really made a name for America. The Phnom Penh people listened to VOA, just like everyone else.

Q: We had Khmer broadcast.

TWINING: We had Khmer broadcasts. Prince Ranariddh, the son of King Sihanouk, was basically prisoner in Phnom Penh during the Lon Nol regime, until they let him out. He learned English by listening to VOA. He acknowledges that to this day. America had a lot of influence. We were also well known as one of the backers of the Paris Peace Accords. We had also opposed Hanoi and were known for our communist opposition to communism. That got a lot of Cambodians thinking that we were maybe the saviors, if you will. It enhanced our image further than it should have because we didn't have the means to deliver. America was interested in Cambodia mainly because we saw the killing that had taken place from 1975 until the end of 1978, and remained horrified by it.

Like Rwanda afterward, we wondered whether we should have done more to try to prevent it. We wanted to make sure it didn't happen again. That is why we were involved in the peace agreement. Was that the basis of a long-term relationship with Cambodia? No. Cambodia is basically a country in the second or third tier of countries. That is how one treats it. It was ridiculous to have this over confidence in what America would do for Cambodia. It was in our interest to make sure the Cambodians dealt more with Southeast Asians, and open up to the whole world. That is the message that I continued to give them.

Q: Did we have any type of visa program to, in particular, get students to the United States?

TWINING: We started a consular operation in Phnom Penh in 1992, just to try to give normal visas. We didn't really have a government program to get Cambodians to the U.S., unfortunately. Indeed, once we had a government program for Indochina, it was oriented toward Vietnam, much more than Cambodia. There were private organizations, though, like the Indochina Reconciliation Center, which did try to help Cambodian students come to the U.S., but that started very, very slowly.

Q: I would have thought that this would have been a venue that the French would have jumped into with both feet, the civilization process and all that.



TWINING: That is very good, Stuart, because the French did. In fact, we would often tell Washington, not that we were rivals of the French, but that this was what the French were doing, and why can't we do something comparable? The French were good at starting up a scholarship program for Cambodians to go to France. I take my hat off to them. When I saw that we weren't really in a position to do the same, my point of view was the more exposure the Cambodians could have to the West, whether it was France or West Germany, or the UK, or Sweden, the better I thought it was for Cambodia. All of their orientation had been to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. It was time to broaden those minds. They wanted broadening. I was glad people like the French stood up and instead said they would give scholarships.

Q: On the Cambodians, I served my time in Vietnam. I have the greatest respect for the Vietnamese. They are hardworking people. I wouldn't be surprised if we had a Vietnamese origin president, at some point. They are extremely bright people. What about the Cambodians?

TWINING: I don't know what it is in a national character. You as an old Indochina hand know the saying, "The Vietnamese make the rice grow, the Cambodians watch it grow, and the Lao listen to it grow." I think there is something to that. There is an assertiveness among the Vietnamese that is not as much there with the Cambodians. The Cambodians are a gentler people. That is the reality. You have one very prominent Cambodian, Ambassador to the UN Sihanouk, who has really worked himself up into positions of responsibility. You have other Cambodian Americans who have done well. A number of them have gone back to Cambodia. Some of them are in the Cambodian government today, as representatives of non-communist movements, with ministerial portfolios. On the other hand, they're not as assertive as the Vietnamese. It's a national characteristic. That is the reality.

Q: I wanted to talk about the relations with Prince Sihanouk. In my oral histories, I've talked with people who used to play volleyball and basketball with Prince Sihanouk, way back in the early 1950s. They had something called the "Sihanouk rules." In basketball, if you ever got hold of the ball, you let him take a shot, and then you went back. In volleyball, you never spiked the ball to Sihanouk. As time went on, he kicked us out. We had a lot of trouble. But, it is a very, very long relationship. During your time, how did you all work with him? Was he part of the consultant thing? Did he sit around with a group, and talk about what to do or not? How did this work?



TWINING: We had a lot of contact with the Prince, who became King after the 1993 elections. Sihanouk made a decision early on, right after he got back in 1991. He said, "The Supreme National Council will meet at the Royal Palace. If I am chairman, I will give it that status. We'll meet at the Royal Palace, rather than in a building of the Phnom Penh regime." That not only gave it a status of independence from the Phnom Penh government, but at the same time, it kept him fully involved. Not only the Supreme National Council, but also refugee meetings were held there. We had a wonderful UN refugee coordinator named Sergio Vieira de Mello who ran those meetings.

Q: He was one of those killed in Iraq.

TWINING: He was subsequently killed in Iraq. He did a spectacular job with the peacekeeping operation. De Mello was one of my best friends. We would get together on Sunday afternoons and drink wine and eat cheese together when we were both in Cambodia. There would also be rehabilitation meetings at the palace. All of this was under Prince Sihanouk's imprimatur and participation. When I was especially concerned about something, I would often get together with him quietly, privately, before SNC meetings, for example. He and I would go down the corridor, just the two of us, and talk. We established ways of communicating via someone on his staff. He would often sit down with the five permanent members when we had problems we wanted to discuss in general with him, or together with Akashi and others. Sihanouk was very flexible. We had a lot of discussions together.

Sihanouk wasn't playing volleyball any longer, but he would often find reasons to give a dinner. The Chinese government assigned him a chef, from China. He was a wonderful chef. We got wonderful food. In fact, Sihanouk's personal staff was from China. The North Koreans gave him his bodyguards. That is just one of the funny ways Cambodia works, was working and still does. He would have evenings where he would begin by singing. He loved to sing. I've got four or five of his CDs. So, instead of volleyball, there would be sing-athons, if you will. These would go on until 12:00, 1:00 a.m., with dancing and the like. I often danced with Princess Monique, now the queen. It was very pleasant. Sihanouk brought a spice of life. Something very Cambodian was restored with Sihanouk coming back to Cambodia. I don't think there can ever be another Sihanouk. As I said before, he was indispensable to the peace process. In fact, we who often work on peacekeeping operations - there is one in Burundi now, for example - often regret that there is not a respected Sihanouk kind of figure who can be above all politics.

Q: Hadn't he really turned into an elder statesman? Would he sit back and ruminate about... You know, he's been through everything you can think of, including palace imprisonment, under the Khmer Rouge, exile in China, and what have you. Did he turn into someone who said, "We tried this, and it didn't work?" Did he seem to know with the Khmer what would work and what wouldn't work?



TWINING: He was 100% Khmer. By the time I went to Cambodia in 1991, and he returned to Cambodia, he was already an elder statesman. Indeed, he would call himself that. "I feel I'm an elder statesman today. I'm no longer the active ruler that I would have been 30 years ago." He recognized that. So, he would express his views, but you could also, knowing his views, talk to him quietly, and say, "Your Royal Highness," or "Your majesty (later), in line with your thinking about this issue, have you thought about extending that thought and adapting it in this way, a way perhaps that Hun Sen will find easier to work with?" He would often say, "You know, you're right. That would be better, if we could adapt it subtly." So, where he may have been on record as saying something publicly, he also had in his older age the wisdom that would enable him to shift gears in a constructive way. He knows his country, and he knows his people. Indeed, we as foreigners would often learn a great deal, have a great deal of insight from him, as to how something might work better.

Q: How about his son?

TWINING: Well, he has several sons and daughters. One of his daughters is an American citizen, in fact, as is a son. His most visible son is named Ranariddh. Ranariddh resembles Sihanouk physically. Ranariddh is highly educated. He is a doctor of law. He was co-prime minister after the elections. Even then, and even today as President of the National Assembly, he goes back to France every year and teaches law at a law school for a few weeks. Prince Ranariddh is a smart individual. He has lived abroad. He is probably much more of a world citizen than his father, who has more of an innate sense of how to deal with villagers. That is how destiny has shaped them. Sihanouk had formed a non-communist party, FUNCINPEC, a royalist movement. Sihanouk stepped down in the mid-1980s and let Ranariddh take over as head of the party. Ranariddh continues to be president of FUNCINPEC. I think he would like to be the king's successor one day. Whether he will be is only 50, 50. [Postscript. Sihanouk later retired and his youngest son, Sihamoni, became King.]

Q: How about Hun Sen?



TWINING: Hun Sen is a street smart individual. Hun Sen came from a small village in a big province of eastern Cambodia called Kampong Cham. He followed the call of Sihanouk in 1970 and left high school to join the Khmer Rouge, which he understood was the anti-Lon Nol movement, the pro-Sihanouk movement. He escaped to Vietnam. He escaped to save his life in 1977. He came back in early 1979, behind the Vietnamese troops and became Foreign Minister at the age of 28. My Soviet ambassador friend met Hun Sen after the takeover. He went to Cambodia in February 1979 on a Soviet mission to see what Cambodia looked like. He said it was just awful, awful. He met Hun Sen at that time and said, "He's a very uneducated guy." Hun Sen didn't quite know what it meant to be foreign minister. There is always competition among Cambodians, and that includes among leaders of the Cambodian Peoples Party, the communist party behind the Phnom Penh regime. By 1991, Hun Sen was clearly first among equals. He is first among equals today. He didn't get there by being an apparatchik; he was there because he had political smarts. He had a connection with the military. He was ex-military, after all. Those were levers of power. We called it the Hun Sen regime, despite other important people who constituted rival power centers to Hun Sen. When I went back in 2001, on a subsequent assignment, for just a couple days, I saw a different Hun Sen. I saw a much more suave leader, a much more polished man in every way. He's just a very skillful politician, a very skillful individual. As he accumulated power, the more bodyguards he needed, the more behind the scenes maneuvering he had to do, especially as a result of the 1993 elections. He's there until someone gets him out.

I could work with him. He's an individual who speaks only Khmer. While my Khmer is not outstanding, he and I could deal with one another in Khmer. One night he called me up and said, "Look, we had a warning, if you will, to put it mildly, a terrorist warning, against your embassy. I just wanted you to know because I think you'd better take some precautions." I was glad he called me. He was someone I could deal with when we had concerns that the Phnom Penh regime needed to do such and such to be in compliance with the Paris agreements, or to honor the election results. He was someone I could talk to. I was especially pleased when my family came out to Cambodia for Christmas in 1994, on Christmas Eve Hun Sen and his wife had my wife and boys and me to dinner. I really appreciated that kindness. Yet, I also think of him as a man who was out to get and keep power, at almost any cost.

In those days, he felt he had to have good relations with the United States. That was a ticket, good relations with the West in general, but the U.S. in particular. Today, his ticket is good relations with China. I guess if I were in his position, I would adapt as well because we don't give much aid any longer. Our influence, unfortunately, isn't what it perhaps was. The Chinese are giving huge amounts of aid. He is working with his bread and butter. Anyway, that is Hun Sen.



Q: I think this is probably a good place to stop. We have talked about most of the personalities, but I think we want to talk about the 1993 elections, and the aftermath, and what you all were up to. Also, at the end, what was your embassy like? It was a very interesting time.

TWINING: It was a very fascinating period of my career, and the relations with the new China.

Q: Is there anything that we have been talking about that you want to mention as a subject?

TWINING: No. I really think we have hit the main things. Let's talk about the elections, and we'll go from there.

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Q: Today is Bastille Day, July 14, 2004. Leading up to the election, I heard it was quite an apparatus there. Did you find yourself playing host to an awful lot of observers? Did you get involved with the preparations to the election?

TWINING: With everything that led up to the election. In fact, we all focused so much on the election, that in hindsight, one didn't focus sufficiently on the aftermath. This was the first election the UN had actually run, as opposed to overseeing. It brought in a two million dollar Cray computer that needed special air conditioning. Of course, once the election was over, nobody was even there to take care of it any longer. The election drew in lots and lots of people. Lots of organizations came in. Just on the international side, there was a lot of activity. One of the things we funded and the UN also funded, was election education for the parties and for communities. After all, this was really the first free and fair election Cambodia may have ever had, though it had had elections during the Sihanouk period, which may not have been quite as free and fair.



It was exciting. My staff and I went around the country a great deal. The UN Special Representative went around observing preparations and stepping in unannounced on voter education campaigns and the like. At the same time, the Cambodian themselves who were running for the elections were all excited. They were titillated. What was going to happen? Could they have a chance? Parties you never heard of, which may have consisted of one or two individuals suddenly came out of the woodwork for the elections. You had elections to choose people to be in the constituent assembly, which as I mentioned before, became the national assembly after writing the constitution. Based upon the number of people elected per party, would you have a coalition government or would one party have control? About a week before the elections, I suddenly found the two leading non-communists, Prince Ranariddh and the old patriarch of Cambodia, Son Sann, both of them having second and third thoughts about their chances of getting anywhere in elections, fearing that Hun Sen and his people would simply, one way or the other, scoop up all the votes. I had to spend time either individually or with others, trying to talk the non-communists into staying in the elections. Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia office director Chris Lafleur helped me considerable. This was just a week before the elections, when you thought the non-communist leaders would have been at the pinnacle of success. Anyway, we passed through that. There were international observers from all over the place. Many Cambodian observers, and we encouraged all of them...

Q: With these observers, in a way, you were one of the point people by inviting all these people into Cambodia. These are known by some to be "sons of bitches" from out of town, coming in, poking around, not being particularly culturally aware or anything else. Was that a problem?

TWINING: You know, it really was not a problem. These people had the right attitude. They were well meaning. A number of them had had Southeast Asian experience or UN experience. The UN also had a lot of UN volunteers on board to do election monitoring and run the elections. It wasn't a problem. It just brought an influx of people, plus lots and lots of journalists. It went well.

The excitement really was on election day. The Khmer Rouge had threatened to blow everything up. A lot of Cambodians thought they well may. You had the non-communists who were up and down. Did they have a chance? Did they not have a chance? Should they stay in? You had nervousness, I think, on the part of the Phnom Penh leading political party, the Cambodians Peoples Party. How was it going to come out of this?



On election day, May 23, at 6:30 a.m., I heard loud bangs. I was still in a hotel room, overlooking the Mekong River. I looked out because when the Khmer Rouge were finally attacking Phnom Penh in 1974, 1975, they often attacked from the east. The Mekong was to the east of my hotel. I looked out the window, wondering whether the attacks had started. Instead, I was hearing thunder, and there was lightning. I thought then that with deluvium rains, nobody would even come out to vote and I went back to bed again. Finally, I roused myself thinking, "I should really go to a couple of the polling places to see what it looks like." We had other people from the U.S. mission out in other parts of the country. I went to the national stadium, where I was astonished to find that I had to fight my way through the crowds. People were lined up by the hundreds, maybe by the thousands, to get into the national stadium to vote. I went to another polling place and found the same thing. Voters had turned out in droves.

Later that day, I went with UN Special Representative Akashi and some others in a helicopter to four or five remote provinces to see what the polling looked like. We went to the city of Battambang in the west, for example. I'll never forget walking into a polling place, and an old monk, maybe 80 years old, told me, "I waited all my life to vote. Finally, I have my dream come true. They are asking my opinion, and I will give it." Old ladies, old men, young people were there, because under the rules the UN established, everyone could vote. In the past, monks didn't vote, and soldiers weren't supposed to. But this time people were voting, and they really were voting en masse. It was a very inspiring day. I think all of us who covered the elections that day were very inspired.

One of the interesting developments concerned potential voters under the control of the Khmer Rouge. The Khmer Rouge clearly did not know whether to allow their people to vote in an election the movement was boycotting. In some places they did allow villagers to vote, whereas in others they told people to stay home. We heard accounts of villagers in the northwest insisting that they would vote, regardless, and marched off to do so, with local Khmer Rouge cadres watching them go, openmouthed. It seemed to suggest that the movement was in the process of genuinely weakening. Then, of course, came the aftermath. It took a long time to count the votes, despite the Cray computer. Cambodia, though a small country, has many remote areas, and ballot boxes had to be flown back to the capital.

Anyway, the election finally was over, and the results were announced. The FUNCINPEC party, Prince Ranariddh's party, received more votes than Hun Sen's Cambodian Peoples Party (CPP), which had actual control of the country. FUNCINPEC naturally expected to take over the government. Lo and behold, the Phnom Penh regime said, "No, you don't; you're not taking over." Already the UN was starting to pack its bags. It wondered what it should do. The troops were all ready to go home. Were they supposed to enforce the results? You had a real standoff.



Then, out of the middle of nowhere came a secessionist movement. Suddenly, we learned that eastern Cambodia was in a breakaway effort from the rest of Cambodia. Where did all this fit in? I was fairly soon convinced that the people in the Phnom Penh regime were behind this secessionist effort, as a way to press the world to accept their stand, at least to participate in the government. I came back to the U.S. for a week, during the stalemate. I learned that others in the international community thought that maybe there should be a compromise with the Phnom Penh government. After all, its CPP had gotten a number of votes, as well. Sihanouk stepped up and proposed, in the midst of the stalemate, that the two main parties form a joint government, a coalition if you will. This would include two co-prime ministers, with co-defense and interior ministers and a division of other ministerial portfolios.

The Cambodians could not say no to Sihanouk. Whatever they really thought, and I think some of them didn't like the idea, they said, "Well, of course, of course." Then, the UN had to weigh in. Other countries, like ourselves, were asked for our views. I was in Washington. I remember Deputy Assistant Secretary Ken Quinn and I sitting down. He said, "What do we do? We're the only ones now that haven't said yes." He said, "FUNCINPEC, the non-communists, the people we have been backing during all the years of communist rule, have won and they're going to be denied control and power. Yet, who is going to enforce their victory, and who is going to go against the king?"

Finally, the United States said, "Well, okay." I remember at the time thinking "Having two co-prime ministers vying for power, this is going to last one week." It lasted until 1997. It lasted four years, when Prime Minister Hun Sen moved against Prime Minister Prince Ranariddh, who was probably himself planning to move against Hun Sen, and simply took over power. Though, the two gave the appearance of trying to make it work. I would listen to them talk together in Khmer. In Cambodia, you would use the word, "older brother, younger brother," among really close friends. I heard Hun Sen calling Ranariddh his older brother, for example. We realized that maybe this did have a chance to work. But it was an awkward arrangement. It was the only place in the world that had two prime ministers. Yet, they had to get things moving forward, so that was the compromise that was reached.

The secession "miraculously" ended in the east once there was political agreement, and people went to work. As the UN operation was reducing from 22,000 people down to nothing, that summer of 1993, the fear was that its inputs into the Cambodian economy had been so great that suddenly Cambodia would go into a depression. I was one of those who suggested, "There are so many international organizations here, and international NGOs, and embassies, that I think the dip in the economy won't be as pronounced as people think." Indeed, it turned out not to be.



There was a new sense of confidence in Cambodia as a result of the UN peacekeeping operation, the successful May 23 election, and the advent of a new government. While there were still hostile incidents coming from some of the remaining Khmer Rouge elements during the following year, at the same time there were an increasing number of Khmer Rouge cadres and their families who, tired of living in malarial forests for so long, started returning to settle in their home villages. I was one of those convinced the Khmer Rouge was disintegrating.

To its credit, the new Cambodian Government was pursuing with vigor military campaigns against Khmer Rouge strongholds. One longtime KR area since 1979 was called Phnom Chat, not far from the Thai border town of Aranyaprathet. In September 1993 the Cambodian Armed Forces were able to take the area, the KR leadership fleeing. I drove in through tall grass two weeks later to see this area of which I had heard so often. It was completely abandoned and, admittedly, spooky. The layout was what was fascinating and proved the wisdom of George Orwell's expression in *Animal Farm*: "All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others." At the base of the hillside were small homes of rank and file Khmer Rouge. Farther up, in the middle, were a half dozen or so houses belonging to the higher level cadres such as Khieu Samphan and Ieng Sary. At the summit, however, there was only one house, a large one. That was Pol Pot's, on which government soldiers had written all kinds of dirty expressions. Clearly, all Khmer Rouge were not equal, whatever the propaganda.

With the new spirit in the country, both investment and foreign aid began to be visible. When I first presented my letter of credential to Prince Sihanouk in 1991, he said to me, "You know, you Americans are known in this country more than anything else for building a highway to the port, from the center of this country, Phnom Penh, down to the Gulf of Thailand." He said, "That would have been over 30 years ago. Please, that road is in disrepair. The Khmer Rouge were hiding out on it to hold people up, to take hostages, for a long time. Please give it attention. It really needs redoing completely." With a new government in place, my own status changed from being a Special Representative to Chargé d'Affaires in 1993, to Ambassador in 1994. The U.S. Government also committed to rebuilding that highway, Phnom Penh's "lifeline". It was the biggest U.S. AID road building project, and probably the last one, with now perhaps the exception of the big road being built in Afghanistan. It was important support to the economy.

Cambodians wanted to make the new Cambodia succeed, and by and large they did. At the same time, the watchdogs were no longer there. Akashi left in August. His last words to me were, "Charlie, please remember Cambodia. Try to continue to give it support, even if it's no longer in the limelight, in the headlines." With the foreign presence largely gone, however, corruption worsened. It wasn't just the government most of whose officials earned only a pittance that was corrupt. All sides were corrupt in Cambodia, and it is still a terrible problem. Thinking back over the peacekeeping operation and the peace agreement that we made, I wish we had thought farther than the election and had thought to keep some part of the peacekeeping presence in Cambodia, more as a reminder that the international community was watching than anything else. But that didn't happen.



In fact, once the elections were over, Cambodians were largely saying, as in Iraq today, "We've had enough of the foreigners telling us what to do." Prince Sihanouk felt that, as much, if not more than anyone. He incarnated Cambodia. He was conscious that Cambodians were not entirely their own masters. I suspect he also believed he might resume his old leadership role. Indeed, in 1993 he became King again. I think he was disappointed because he found, under a democracy, however imperfect, that people don't want a king telling them what to do. He had to be a little more reserved in giving advice, and he hoped his advice would be followed.

The next big event that happened in Cambodia was in 1994, a year later. There was an attempted coup. To this day, it's not exactly clear why, and even who was acting behind it. Two or three nights before the coup, I went over to the home of the co-interior minister, Sin Song. There were two interior ministers, but this was the one with authority, the one from the Cambodian Peoples Party. I found him very depressed, very discouraged. He said, "Nothing is going right. We thought we would get democracy, and that the resources were being spread around for the good of the people. Instead, I see kleptomania on the part of everybody in the government. I just feel like doing something about it." I said to him, "Your Excellency, work through the system. Don't work from outside the system. If you work through the system, I think your chances are better. If you try a coup, you'll find the United States cutting off all assistance to Cambodia. You'll find the world reacting negatively to a coup. It will do you no good." The Minister said he tried reasoning with Hun Sen, to no avail.

Sin Song fomented a coup a couple of days later. He was joined by one of King Sihanouk's sons, Prince Chakrapong. It didn't have a chance of success. Not many troops or police were loyal to them. It was put down. Sin Song fled to Vietnam. Chakrapong took refuge in a hotel. Suddenly, on a Sunday morning, I had a telephone call. "Prince Chakrapong needs you. He needs to see you." So, I went to midtown Phnom Penh at 7:30, 8:00 a.m. An American journalist named Nate Thayer, the son of former Ambassador Harry Thayer, was with Chakrapong. Nate was working for the Far Eastern Economic Review.

With me was the other interior minister from the royalist, non-communist party, FUNCINPEC, You Hockry. He said, "Look, Chakrapong is held up in this hotel. He is afraid if he leaves the hotel, he is going to be grabbed, and who knows what will happen to him. He shouldn't have been involved in what he was doing, but he was involved for whatever reason. We have to find a way to get him out of there." The next thing I knew, on my cell phone was Queen Monineath calling from the palace, with King Sihanouk talking in her ear. I could hear him talking to her. They were saying, "Please try to work out a solution to get him out of the country." I said I would try.



Prince Chakrapong also called me while I was standing down in the street, requesting political asylum in the U.S. I ducked the question, saying, "Your Royal Highness, I am in the middle of the street; how can I give you political asylum?" At that point co-Interior Minister You Hockry and I went up to the Prince's hotel room and found a distressed individual. Once we convinced Chakrapong that he should leave the country, with Thayer witnessing, You Hockry took it from there, negotiating with the Hun Sen side for Chakrapong's safe passage out of Cambodia. You Hockry escorted the Prince to the airport.

I strove to minimize my own involvement, hardly wanting to be seen to be in favor of a coup in a country where we were doing everything possible to try to hold it together and make a go of it after so many years of warfare and a large UN operation. The coup was a dumb move, in any case, and I still suspect there was more to it, e.g., an attempt by others to get rid of some troublesome individuals, for example, than was apparent.

Here we are 10 years later. Sin Song is back in Cambodia, back in favor. Chakrapong is back in Cambodia. I think he has an airline going. Cambodians make temporary alliances. They change their alliances, and they make new alliances. That is often the way it works, but it's better than outright hostility. The coup attempt happened in 1994. It's like every year, there is some event in Cambodia that upsets the normal pace of things.

Meanwhile, the economy was really starting to develop; the more people felt safe in going about the country, the more they felt safe in investing their money. King Sihanouk, after the road building started, was pointing down the road to me, Highway no. 4, and saying, "You see the new houses being built along that highway. Do you know what that means? Economic development is up, you will see." He was right. We were also negotiating with Cambodia at that time on an investment treaty which with strong labor provisions would dismantle tariff barriers between our countries. By the time I had left, garment factories were getting started, leading to exports to the U.S. and elsewhere.

The longer I stayed in Cambodia - remember I started working on Cambodia in 1974 and knew a lot of Cambodians - the more the Cambodians were pulling me into their internal squabbles, their power struggles. I had to step back and let them know that I was a diplomat representing the United States, that I wasn't there to make peace among Cambodians, particularly not at a time when they had their own elected government.



After all this time, Cambodia was becoming wearing. I realized that it was time for me to get out, that new blood was needed on the U.S. side in Cambodia. My decision to leave was helped by a call from the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, George Moose, asking if I would go back to Cameroon as ambassador, noting that our relations had not been the best in recent years and hoping that someone who knew the country could improve things. I agreed and returned to Washington and had my hearing in mid-1995. Senator Jesse Helms put a hold on me and other nominees because he didn't like the Chemical Weapons Treaty. At that point, I suggested to East Asian Bureau that I go back to Cambodia until things were worked out with the Hill. I remained at post until late November 1995.

Amazingly, the next event in Cambodia's ongoing political drama occurred just before I left. I was given a farewell party by Deputy Chief of Mission Robert Porter two nights before I left. At that party was King Sihanouk's half-brother, who was a fine fellow, Prince Norodom Sirivudh, Secretary General of FUNCINPEC. I noticed there were very few people there from the Phnom Penh regime side, from the Cambodian Peoples Party. I didn't know what to think of it. As soon as Sirivudh left the DCM's house, he was arrested by Hun Sen's police. A man who unfortunately doesn't always watch what he says, Sirivudh had said over the telephone about Hun Sen, "He's playing all these games. We're going to get him." Hun Sen decided it was a direct threat against him and arrested one of the principal players on the non-communist side. So, I spent my last two days in meetings with co-Prime Minister Prince Ranariddh (Sirivudh's nephew and party chief) and with others on the CPP side, basically telling them, "If Sirivudh is guilty, then he deserves a fair trial." I passed that message to Hun Sen's people over and over again. It was with that crisis, in which Cambodian strongman Hun Sen eliminated a political rival in the fledgling democracy, that I would up my time in Cambodia.

Ten years later, Prince Sirivudh is back in Cambodia. He is the Secretary General of FUNCINPEC again and a senior official in the government. Such is the way of Cambodia.

Q: How did you feel? Were you the repository of all knowledge about Cambodia, or had they developed a cadre?

TWINING: It's a good question. We really tried to develop a cadre. I mentioned the people who went through Khmer language training, to be ready when we opened up in Cambodia, on a previous occasion. We insisted that the Department continue to train people in Khmer. The DCM, political officer, economic officer, USIA officer, were all succeeded by Cambodian speakers. They formed and continued to be part of an expanding cadre of Cambodian specialists. That's good because you need the younger specialists. By the time I left, we had a fair sized embassy. We had a defense attaché, despite DOD saying earlier, "No, they don't need to be there." That operation built up. We were doing military cooperation activities, de-mining training. We had a larger AID operation. We had a good, active USIA operation. The place had built up to a degree that we probably should have anticipated, but really didn't.



By the time I left, I sent a cable out saying, "The Khmer Rouge are finished." Indeed, they basically were. I suggested that Cambodia, if anything would have more problems in the future than it had in the past, as the Cambodians worked out how to make their country move forward, and how to do it together, which has not proven to be easy in a country with little real democratic tradition, weak institutions, and a society destroyed by the Khmer Rouge.

Q: By the time you left Cambodia, what was its position, vis a vis ASEAN?

TWINING: By the time I left... We had tried increasingly to try to get Cambodia to relate to Southeast Asia. Its ties with Vietnam, its ties with Russia, were more a thing of the past. Cambodia needed to trade with Southeast Asia. It shouldn't just look to the West to be the savior. Indeed, it was related to Southeast Asia. Trade was increasing. Investment was coming in from Southeast Asia. So, what is the logical next step? The logical next step then was, "Should they join ASEAN?" They were thinking about it, and yet it was daunting to both the Cambodians as well as the Vietnamese and the Lao. ASEAN, even when I was in Phnom Penh, had something like 300 meetings a year. The Cambodians were saying, "How could we possibly go to that many meetings? How many English speakers do we have to go and sit in that many meetings?" They were hesitant about it. ASEAN, for its part, was a bit reluctant, saying, "We're very comfortable, we the six members of ASEAN, the old members, Do we really want to open the door to new ones?" We would have to suggest to ASEAN, "Look, it is in your interest to rope in the three Indochina countries, to pull them into the Southeast Asia orbit."

Slowly but surely that was coming about. It was very healthy. What stopped Cambodia's joining ASEAN was Hun Sen's assumption of full power in 1997. Just when Cambodia should have gone into ASEAN as a full member, that was delayed until things were ironed out between Hun Sen and Ranariddh.

Q: So, you left there when?

TWINING: 1995.

Q: And then whither?

TWINING: Secretary Albright persuaded Senator Helms finally to lift this hold on me, Stapleton Roy (Indonesia), John Malott (Malaysia) and others who had been waiting in the wings to go out to posts. After several months on hold, attendance in the Ambassador's course, the government shutdown and a giant snowstorm, in January 1996, I went with my wife and son Steve to Yaounde, Cameroon.



I was accredited to Cameroon and Equatorial New Guinea. We might begin with Cameroon. I had done Cameroon from 1983 to 1985. I found the place changed in many ways in 1996. The people don't change. The people were still great people, and it was good to be back in Cameroon. But it was a changed place. Maybe what really did it was that in 1990 President Biya finally opened the doors to democracy in Cameroon. I reminded him that when he had visited Douala, Cameroon in 1983, just after coming to power, he said he was going to open the doors. It took him a while to do it but it finally happened.

With the movement to political pluralism in 1990, the heavy handed calm of a one-party state began to disappear as people clamored for freedom, organized political parties, and called for free and fair elections. The regime wasn't quite sure how to react.

Q: The inquisitor just went and looked at the map to make sure where Cameroon was located. I had the African continent in mind, even the west coast.

TWINING: You were almost there. In any case, it became a difficult time, as people were sometimes excessive in enjoying their right to democratic expression in a country with a regime which until then had been accustomed to operating a one-party state and calling the shots. This was particularly challenging for our ambassador at the time, Frances Cook. Her successor, Harriet Isom, had a bit easier time, as Cameroonians adjusted to the new situation and started to calm down. That was after a disastrous election in 1992, which the U.S. said wasn't free and fair, however.

As a result of that election, the U.S. reacted by reducing its support to Cameroon. We eliminated the large AID mission. We halted military sales. We did a lot to show our displeasure to Cameroon. I can't believe that is the way to proceed if one wishes to really have an impact on the leadership. We only hurt the ordinary people, those who were benefiting from our support for Heifer Project International or AID funding to improve plant strains, and the like. It's not the president or the prime minister who feel our cuts. Anyway, we went through a tough time.

By the time I got out there, I was determined to keep Cameroon's evolution toward openness moving forward, to seek ways to strengthen this nascent democracy. At the same time, we also had to remember we had other interests in Cameroon, and keep a good balance in the relationship. That included reaching out to government officials, not just to hear what they had to say, but to be able to tell them, "Look, you need to do what is right, and we want to support you as you do that."

Q: Would you describe the Embassy in Yaounde?



TWINING: The Embassy was a medium-sized post. First of all, Cameroon was the hub country of former French Central Africa, and much involved, and revolved around, Cameroon, requiring heightened interaction on our parts. Secondly, our Embassies in the sub-region often needed services, e.g., personnel, budget, which were provided out of Embassy Yaounde, making it a regional embassy of sorts. It was no accident that we were on the receiving end of two evacuations from the Central African Republic and one from Congo-Kinshasa while I was in Yaounde. With Cameroon's stability and facilities, it was a natural place to receive evacuees, as the Embassy had done periodically from Chad in the past, as well.

Despite the loss of USAID, the Embassy had nevertheless well developed political, economic/commercial, administrative, and consular sections. A small but active Defense Attaché<sup>1/2</sup> office was there to serve five countries in the region. The United States Information Service was active, due to Cameroon's numerous universities, press, and NGO's, all involving a large segment of educated people to whom it was important to relate. The Embassy was of sufficient size to require the basing of a detachment of Marines. With the unfortunate closure of ConGen Douala earlier, we found commercial, representational, and consular needs in that, the country's largest commercial center, such that we had to open shortly thereafter an "Embassy office" with an FSO in charge. Frequent visits by all of us in the Embassy relied upon that office for necessary support.

Critical to a post of this size is the Deputy Chief of Mission. The Ambassador is frequently the "outside" person, the one who appears in the press alongside high-level officials, for example. The DCM is the Ambassador's alter ego, replacing him in his absence, of course, but perhaps more importantly serving as the officer in charge of internal management. I was most fortunate to have an excellent DCM in Mark Boulware, a colleague from Ouagadougou who was a French and Spanish speaker and an experienced administrative officer, exactly what was needed in Yaounde.

All personnel in the Embassy were also accredited to Equatorial Guinea. We had a middle grade, Spanish-speaking officer assigned to Yaounde just to follow events in EG and to make numerous visits to a country quickly becoming important to the U.S. due to the American discovery of oil. Our economic/commercial, security, administrative, and political officers all had to travel there. USIS Yaounde was required to be imaginative in developing programs to include Equatorial Guinea. Needless to say, that was one of those places where the Defense Attaché<sup>1/2</sup> had to be involved, as well, both in terms of making contacts, arranging for a ship visit, and even supporting training of relatively untrained EG military personnel in areas such as civil-military relationships and human rights. The EG dimension was an important and time consuming part of the work of Embassy Yaounde, both in terms of personnel and resources.

Q: Would you speak more about the atmosphere you encountered in Cameroon in 1996?



All of the political problems in the early 1990s also resulted in a lot of the foreigners and foreign investments leaving Cameroon. Cameroon has been a center of foreign investment. It's a relatively rich country. There's lots of cocoa, coffee, timber, mineral resources, and a good educated population. It is a place where you could do business. When I was Consul General in Douala, we had an active American business club, for example, because there was considerable U.S. trade and investment. A lot of that dried up. U.S. banks left. It had become a different sort of scene.

Q: What other countries were seeking to influence Cameroon?

TWINING: The U.S., France, and Britain, along with the Dutch, the Germans, were the principal countries trying to weigh in as friends with Cameroon Government authorities and to be friends as well with opposition figures. We sought to encourage investment, rather than discourage investment, encourage strengthening the rule of law, and support human rights and basic freedoms. It was an exciting time as Cameroonians became more accustomed to the democratic process.

One of the things I tried to do was to follow the example of a predecessor from my earlier period in Cameroon, Ambassador Myles Frechette. He went periodically and sat down with the president, and they just chatted. President Biya would call him over to discuss an issue. It was good. I was determined to try to emulate Myles and develop similar ties with the president. I thought it important to try to provide him views that he might not hear from the "yes" men who surrounded him. I enjoyed having regular meetings with the president. It was just the two of us, just as you and I would be sitting here together, sitting alongside one another on the sofa. It wouldn't happen all that often, every two or three months, but it was a fairly rare event among the diplomatic corps. President Biya reminded me how much he had liked Ambassador Frechette from 12, 13 years earlier, particularly his manner of just wanting to talk.

There were some bad human rights problems when I was in Cameroon, as you find in many underdeveloped countries. For example, a number of people in the North West province tried to demonstrate but were arrested and thrown into jail, without charges. I met with President Biya several times and said, "You have to give these people a trial. Don't just lock them up and leave it there." One of Cameroon's leading journalists, Pius Njawa was jailed on another occasion. He was an opposition journalist, whose paper had the widest readership in Cameroon, which was great. With democracy came freedom of the press, and there were more papers than I could keep up with. But to arrest the leading editor in the country because the government didn't like what he was saying, was hardly supportive of a democratic image.



I would say to the president, "Mr. President, by doing this, you're hurting Cameroon. The government is hurting itself, much more than you're hurting the editor who is locked up." He would say, "Oh, well, we have a system. He has to go on trial. We just can't release someone for nothing." I said, "I really think if you can find a way to do it, you should do it, because you're only hurting yourself." Indeed, three months after I left Cameroon, I received a message out in Hawaii on behalf of the president, saying, "This editor, Mr. Njawe, has been released. Tell Mr. Twining this is a present to him." That was satisfying.

Q: That was very nice.

TWINING: Cameroon was a country where one could usefully maintain a large number of contacts to help influence its evolution. It was important to talk to ministers, to opposition leaders like John Fru Ndi and Bello Bouba Maigari, to maintain a dialogue with the president and with people who played golf with the president, and with the indigenous business community and leaders in civil society. I tried especially to encourage, as did my Western colleagues, the development and strengthening of indigenous, non-government organizations. Women's groups, for example, and journalists organizations, and environmentalists. These are all elements that make up the fabric of democracy. We obtained money here and there to help support groups to do seminars, or women's education, or literacy training, or voter registration. This has lasting impact. Cameroon still has some way to go, it still has corruption, and it still has elections that don't always turn out to be completely great elections. That of 1997 was a mixed bag. It was good in some places, but not in other places. One of my people found ballot boxes full of ballots along a roadside, for instance. Yet, Cameroon has a vitality to it that is genuinely exciting.

One significant commercial development occurred while I was in Cameroon, where it wasn't always easy to encourage investment during the 1990s. Exxon had discovered oil in southeastern Chad. The only way to get that oil out for sale was to build a pipeline that came down through Cameroon to the ocean. Negotiations occurred during my watch to build the multi-million dollar pipeline, 700 kilometers in length, with World Bank support. The pipeline just started functioning some months ago, to the betterment of poor Chad, but also Cameroon, in both of which unique mechanisms were put into place to monitor the disbursement of revenues. Note that Cameroon has been producing oil for some time thanks to an American firm, Pecten, now a subsidiary of Royal Dutch Shell.

Q: With these non-governmental organizations, I would think that... I don't know African society very well, but it sounds like it works well within the society. Village groups and other groups are used to coalescing this way, and finding agreement on issues.



TWINING: I think it is very true. Those groups are used to forming, to do something for a village. Then, too you would have university groups that formed, so why not expand the concept? Get past ethnic boundaries, for example. You are really building a nation in the process. These organizations worked well. It took courage to organize, sometimes. Cameroonians organized a number of human rights NGOs, for example. One was way up in the northern part of Cameroon, in a very strictly Muslim area. I had to admire the courage of the people behind this human rights NGO because they didn't have foreigners up there to protect them. They really were on their own, in an environment that wasn't always as open to freedom of expression as you might wish. You had to say, "My hats off to you people. If you have problems, let us know. We'll try to weigh in with the government." They did sometimes, and we weighed in. It took action on the part of a lot of people to create these NGOs. They almost always had a positive effect, I would say.

Q: Did you find support from NGO centers in the United States?

TWINING: It would depend. In some cases, yes. In some cases, you could be instrumental in linking them up with a U.S. NGO. We certainly tried to do that, or they might be linked up with a European NGO, or they might be linked up with NGOs in other African countries, which to me would be very healthy, and the right direction to go. Obviously, if there was a U.S. link, it sometimes resulted in their getting a little money to help their effort. We tried to use our programs through the United States Information Service to send such people on international visitor grants to the U.S., NGO leaders, so they could meet some of their counterparts in the U.S. That was successful.

Q: How about universities? Were they important? The intellectual class?

TWINING: Yaounde alone has three major universities, and there are universities elsewhere. Douala, Buea on the side of Mt. Cameroon, Dschang. Cameroon has a university up in the north, in Garoua. Cameroon has a fairly well developed university system. It has never had enough resources to meet the needs. It provides people to fulfill government functions or enter business. You would see a rotation: the head of one of the universities might suddenly be the Minister of Higher Education, or work at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or another university professor may become an assistant at the presidency, then return to university life. The system allowed intellectuals to have some input into national affairs, which was beneficial.

Q: How about at this time, the influence of the French?



TWINING: The French influence was clearly strong. The French influence is strong in any former colony of France. That's the way it is. The French still gave more aid than anybody else to former possessions. They deserved to have some influence. They had many nationals in Cameroon, working in forestry and elsewhere, or serving as aid workers. French influence was strong, and yet, I don't know whether it was the enlightened envoys the French sent or what; I never had problems with the French. We worked with the French embassy, with the French ambassador. We often worked together, for example on a human rights issue. One of us might say, "Why don't I go in and hit this person up today, and you go in and talk to that minister tomorrow?" We often cooperated together. I think it's the way we should be working.

Q: Where did Cameroon fit in the African Bureaus interest?

TWINING: Cameroon didn't rank as high as I thought it should. With thirteen million people, it is not a big country, and yet in Central African terms, except for Congo-Kinshasa or Nigeria, it is probably the most important country. Cameroon has something like 174 languages, representing many ethnic groups, a huge mixture of people. Yet, if you are Assistant Secretary of State, or an Undersecretary of State, you focus on places where there are problems; you're looking at Rwanda, Nigeria, or Sudan. With its relative calm, Cameroon is a place in their minds for an evacuation from elsewhere. "Well, we evacuated to Cameroon," and evacuees would come into a five-star hotel. It's a nice place to land, like an R&R center.

Cameroon, I think, was a bit taken for granted. Also, there was this legacy that they hadn't handled their entry into democracy very well, so are they really a good guy? Yet, wasn't it nice having Cameroon there when we needed it? As I noted, we received evacuees at least three different times while I was there. You never knew what was going to happen in Chad. Cameroon was kind of a mixed bag, insofar as Washington was concerned. Basically Washington didn't give Cameroon very much thought. Cameroon fell under the Office of Central African Affairs and was handled by a mid-level desk officer who also covered Equatorial Guinea.

Q: You mention receiving evacuees. I haven't heard much about it recently, but I recall back in the bad old days, we were dumping people in Athens or somewhere else. There were a lot of complaints about nobody caring about them or the wives and children were sent to a place, and their husbands stayed on. It's a different world, of course. Were you able to muster support, and deal with this then?



TWINING: Evacuees would arrive tired and a little bewildered. Enterprising spouses from our mission did yeoman service in getting other spouses together to help families feel welcome. Your administrative and consular people provided fine support. I must admit that when you are chief of mission and you see your people taking that on, it is very satisfying. Your evacuations are never at 10:00 in the morning; we would sometimes be at the airport at 1:00 or 2:00 during the night, waiting for the plane to come in. When people were willing to give of themselves, I think it really made a nice impression on the evacuees. Then, I was told early on by my administrative officer that, as chief of mission, I had the right to authorize free phone calls. I authorized all the evacuees to call home at U.S. government expense. Now is that truly legal? Is that somewhere in the FAM? I haven't a clue, but it certainly helped the morale of the evacuees.

Q: It would just be an embassy cost.

TWINING: It was. It was very good for their morale. We were able to put them in a five-star hotel, giving them some tender loving care. In fact, the evacuees who came from Kinshasa the day I left Yaounde in August 1998, all arrived on a Cameroon airlines plane. They attended my last big farewell party. You tried to make it as painless for them as possible. For some of them, they just wanted to rest. They wanted good food and a nice bed to sleep in. Again, we could provide that in Cameroon.

Q: Did Cameroon play any part in the West African peacekeeping force, or other things of this nature?

TWINING: To be honest, Cameroon didn't do very much in that regard. When I was in Cambodia, Cameroon did volunteer some police to come and serve under the UN in Cambodia. For reasons I never quite understood, Cameroon didn't volunteer military peacekeeping units, though. Cameroon didn't play major roles in African organizations like the Organization of African Unity, or in regional organizations, even though Central African organizations were mostly headquartered in Cameroon. Cameroon didn't give them the attention or the boost that probably would have been useful.

It's funny; the flights to Paris are full, back and forth. Yet, when it comes to interest in other African countries, and playing the role that they could well play, they don't. For example, in peacekeeping, my God, I certainly encouraged them to do it. They just didn't step up to the plate. It's a pity. They were good about taking refugees. They had refugees from every African country in the region. They were very good at that, and respecting the rights of refugees. Yet, they didn't take that extra step that they could have taken on the inter-African side.

Q: I take it that for sustenance, the league would head to Paris?



TWINING: The Francophone Cameroonians were very much tied into French culture, French fashion and French food, and so forth. The Anglophones far less so, of course. Don't forget that modern Cameroon is an amalgamation of former British and French portions and they retain distinctive identities. Cameroon is a member of the Commonwealth.

Q: They had a good soccer team not too long ago.

TWINING: They've had good soccer teams for a very long time, not always well managed unfortunately, but an excellent soccer team, the Indomitable Lions. That was always one of the benefits of being in Cameroon, seeing very good soccer.

Q: Coming from this hub of the universe, what did you do then, Charlie?

TWINING: As I said, I was also accredited to Equatorial Guinea.

Q: Oh, yes. Let's talk about that.

TWINING: Equatorial Guinea. I mentioned that when I was in Douala, we had to support our small embassy in Malabo. Our people had gone through a terrible time under the first president, Macias. Then, by the time I went back to Cameroon in 1996, we had closed our little embassy in Malabo, unfortunately, in 1994, for budgetary reasons, like ConGen Douala. In 1995, an American firm struck oil. I arrived in early 1996, and found people didn't want to talk about Cameroon, they wanted to talk about Equatorial Guinea. We had Americans over in Equatorial Guinea who thought they should have protection by the embassy, consular services. The EG government of President Obiang was not quite sure of how to deal with oil. The unexpected fortune required it to open up to the world. It provided it with resources to do something, either to put in one's pockets or spend for a good cause. Thus, suddenly the U.S. focus was on Equatorial Guinea. Here we had just closed our embassy, which was a dumb, dumb thing.



As I mentioned earlier, a position was assigned to our embassy to provide an officer to serve as an Equatorial Guinea watcher. This officer, Kent Brokenshire, spoke Spanish and French. He and I would go over frequently, often flying in small Russian airplanes, manned by Russian pilots. You wondered whether they were ever maintained. The U.S. government wasn't supposed to fly in the things, but often it was the only way to get there, so you did it. My DCM would go over. The commercial officer would go over. A USIS person would go over, though at the same time his or her headquarters was saying, "We're in Cameroon, but we're not in EG, so we're not going to do anything there." We had to. By gosh, Equatorial Guinea went very quickly from discovering oil to developing oil fields, to building oil tanks, storage tanks, and places for tankers to pick up oil.

Mobil Oil was the principal player, but there were also a couple of small American oil companies operating. I went over to the inauguration of Mobil Oil's first big oil platform. Someone told me just the other day that our investment in Equatorial Guinea in oil, in this little tiny country of a few hundred thousand people, was probably now up to about five billion dollars. The current project about to start is for a plant to liquefy natural gas.

So, my role would be to go to Equatorial Guinea, sit down with the president and the foreign minister, and others, and urge them to use their oil revenues for the people, for the good of the people. Also, I would talk about opening up the regime. Move away from a one-party state. Allow some winds of freedom to blow. Watch out for human rights. Don't lock up people, wily nily, because they are saying something against you and against the government. I went over fairly often and had good conversations. President Obiang and I would often sit down over dinner in the evening and talk. This was in a country where I didn't speak the language. I didn't speak Spanish.

However, what had changed in Equatorial Guinea between the time I visited there in 1984 or 1985, and going back in 1996, was that it had gone from having Spanish as its only world language, to becoming more French speaking. One could now talk to the president in French. The president isn't well educated at all. He was a military officer when he overthrew and executed his uncle, Macias, the savage first president. President Obiang strived to do better to improve himself. He realized when he was having to talk to the presidents of Gabon, or of most other countries in the area, that he had to speak French, because they didn't speak Spanish. The ruling class in Equatorial Guinea had all learned French. It made my life a lot easier. The opposition people were not quite as fortunate. There often, I would use the Equatorial Guinea watcher to interpret. You wanted to be seen sitting down with the opposition people, to make the point that they had a right to be politically active, just like those in the ruling party have the right to do.



It was interesting to see desperately poor Equatorial Guinea suddenly have wealth. I kept saying, "Mr. President, please use this money for the population." It was sad not to see this being done. Shortly before I left, he said, "We're going to pave some streets in the capital city." I said, "Good, that is a step in the right direction." Remember, Equatorial Guinea is both on an island and on the African mainland. The island is Bioko, and the mainland is called Rio Muni. The president is from the mainland, as is most of the leadership in Equatorial Guinea. It is often said that people on Bioko were in opposition to these people from the mainland. We would say, "Please try to spread it around, not just in the capital city, but on the island, and on the mainland." But that was always a struggle to try to get them to do that, and not just build big houses with the money. It is an ongoing struggle.

Q: Did we put an embassy back in?

TWINING: I lobbied hard to reopen in Malabo. We had had an embassy chancery and a residence, two nice buildings into which we poured huge amounts. The EG government kept them both empty for us in the hope that we would return. I said, "Look, here's our chance to go back into our buildings." I couldn't get Washington's attention. In fact, frankly, what got Washington's attention more were the oil companies.

Q: I was going to say, "Why listen to you?"

TWINING: Even with the oil companies, it took a while to get Washington's attention. Finally, EG the government, the prime minister said, "I think I'll just take this house that you've abandoned." He took one of our two buildings, on both of which we had stopped paying rent. He is living in it today. The other building just steadily deteriorated. Under Secretary of State Thomas Pickering picked up my argument about needing to have somebody there to represent us. In fact, President Obiang told me, "Look, I don't care if you don't put a full embassy in here. I just want somebody I can talk to. I want somebody who can help us out with visas." The oil companies said, "We need people to go to Houston." Well, where were they going to get their visas? Equator Guineans had to go to Yaounde, 700 kilometers away, to get their visas. So, we lobbied. Pickering took up the cudgels, trying to get at least a one-person post established. That was probably in 1997.

Finally, we established our one-person post about a year and a half ago. This is July 2004. It took that long. Security people were all concerned. Management people were saying, "Where is the money?" People were asking, "What kind of communication will such a person have?" At least now we have a one-person shop in Malabo, where it is overseen by Embassy Yaounde. It is surprising how much of Embassy Yaounde's time Equatorial Guinea took up.



On my first trip into Equatorial Guinea, as ambassador, I presented my credentials to President Obiang in maybe February or March 1996. I knew no one in Malabo. The one person I met who could help me get around town was the Spanish chargé d'affaires. He said to me, "Besides presenting your credentials, let me drive you down the road, and show you a little bit of the countryside." I said, "Great, I don't know anybody here. I would love to do it." The oil companies were just getting started, doing exploratory drilling. I accompanied the Spanish chargé d'affaires outside of town when we encountered a roadblock. All these police stopped us. "Where are you going? What are you doing?" The chargé d'affaires said, "We're just taking a little ride." We went a little further. He said, "I guess I better turn around." We came back to Malabo.

I was immediately called in by the foreign minister, "What were you up to with the Spanish? What were you doing?" I said, "I wanted to see the countryside?" "Well, are you sure you and the Spanish aren't plotting something?" I said, "No, I'm trying to see the countryside." It made me realize, just like in the closed regime in Cambodia in 1991, we needed to force the door open a little bit in EG. So, on each succeeding trip that I made to Malabo, and to the mainland later, I insisted on getting out and about a bit more. I was able to prove the point. I'm having lunch with someone tomorrow who helped me get into the mainland portion originally, to drive through it. You couldn't do that previously. It was a matter of opening the door.

Q: Were they accredited to the United Nations?

TWINING: Yes, Equatorial Guinea was a member of the UN.

Q: Did they play any role there?

TWINING: No. They're just too small. They recognize they're too small.

Q: Well, Charlie, you left there when?

TWINING: I left Cameroon and said goodbye to Equatorial Guinea in August 1998. A few months before, I led a trade mission, a West African trade mission to Chicago, together with Tibor Nagy, Ambassador to Guinea. Cameroonians made up about half of the trade mission. They are dynamic business people. The other members were from Central and West African countries. While I was on the trade mission in Chicago, in May 1998, the State Department tracked me down. I couldn't imagine why. I was told to call State immediately. It appeared that Under Secretary of State Pickering was concerned that the State relationship with U.S. Pacific Command, where we had a political advisor wasn't working out too well. Asia was too important not to have someone who could work closely with the Admiral in charge.



Ambassador Pickering asked the Director General of the Foreign Service to find me and see if I would be willing to leave Cameroon early to go to Honolulu. Whoever called Cameroon to try to find me first, talked to my wife. She said, "Honolulu, of course." We had reached agreement. What it meant was I cut my tour short in Cameroon by about five months to go to Honolulu. It was nice of Ambassador Pickering to think of me. My wife had worked and lived in Hawaii after graduating from college. She dreamed of going back. It was time. She was always having problems with the malaria medicine that we had to take in Africa. I left Cameroon in August 1998 and went to Honolulu, to serve as the foreign policy advisor for the U.S. Pacific Command.

Q: You did that from when to when?

TWINING: I was there from September 1998 until September 2001, so for three years.

Q: Who was the admiral and how did you get along with him?

TWINING: The admiral at the time was Joseph Prueher, who subsequently became our ambassador to China. I was with Admiral Prueher in Honolulu until early 1999. He was replaced by another four-star admiral, Dennis Blair. They were two different men. Prueher looked very much like an admiral. He really did. He was a very good-looking man. He was a Navy pilot. He worked the staff well. He was a good diplomat. Blair, his successor, was probably the most intelligent person I had ever worked with. His mind was always going. If he wanted to know something, he would contact... It was perhaps like John F. Kennedy contacting a desk officer. Blair would contact anybody at anytime, and forget about the chain of command. He was willing to find something out. He was always asking questions about things that you had to scurry to find the answers on, because he was always a step or two ahead of you. He was a brilliant man, and a wonderful person to work with. Those were two good admirals, for a very interesting assignment.

A POLAD, is what they call a foreign policy advisor. You were there as the State Department representative. You got to weigh in with the head of this huge command that covered half of the earth's surface, to give a diplomatic or a State Department point of view on things that he is doing, or has a mind to do. Sometimes the news may not be good that you are giving, but it is just a healthy part of the Defense-State interaction. You also received State Department visitors coming through. We encouraged people to come through, talk to the military about what are they doing in Mongolia, what are they doing in Papua New Guinea. That was important to do. You interacted with foreign visitors. You would travel a fair amount too.



Protocol wise, you were the number three individual in the command. Therefore, if you traveled with the admiral, and went to Beijing, you would be seated next to him, when he met with the foreign minister of the People's Republic of China, for example. The admiral would depend on his foreign policy advisor to carry a lot of the load with foreigners. It was a fascinating time.

Q: What was the relationship between CINCPAC and the combatant commands?

TWINING: The Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Pacific Command was the overall commander of all military personnel in the Asia-Pacific arena, extending from the West Coast of the U.S., from San Diego to Alaska, all the way west through India and south to Australia, with the exception of Korea. As head of the unified command, the CINC, as he was called in the pre-Rumsfeld era, reported directly to the Secretary of Defense, although he customarily passed through the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He oversaw subordinate commands of the Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps, all based in Hawaii for Asia and the Pacific, and commands scattered about that reported to them, such as on Guam. Particularly important was the subordinate unified command in major ally Japan, U.S. Forces in Japan [USFJ]. While component elements of USFJ related to their service superiors. The CINC was their actual commander and theoretically had the final word on issues, though the decision-making process sometimes required negotiations with the respective service chiefs in Washington before something was finalized.

The exception, and one that could well cause problems, had to do with Korea. U.S. Forces in Korea [USFK] was itself an independent, unified command, due both to the importance of the Korean War and its aftermath and because it also functioned as a UN Command. The CINC of USFK reported directly to the Secretary of Defense. In the event of war, USFK would conduct the fighting on the allied side, with the Pacific Command [PACOM] responsible for providing all necessary support, no questions asked. In peacetime, USFK was clearly in charge on the Korean peninsula but had to depend on PACOM for its personnel and logistics. It was vital that the two CINCS work out ways to get along. Were one to do an end run to the Secretary of Defense or to the Congress on an issue in which the other had an interest, there could be fireworks. From what I observed, both Admirals Prueher and Blair went out of their ways to ensure good relations with their USFK counterparts.

Q: What was your main policy focus? Or that of CINCPAC?



TWINING: Major, of course, was China/Taiwan. The Chinese had all these missiles pointed at Taiwan, and they still do. The U.S. pledged to support Taiwan's defense. This hardly meant Taiwan do or die, of course, but we had to be conscious of Taiwan's military needs and try to be supportive while contributing fully to the diplomatic relationship between the U.S. and the Peoples Republic of China. Multifaceted diplomacy, including the development of a good working relationship between American and Chinese defense and military officials, was vital if peace were to be maintained across the Taiwan Strait. Attention to China, both in its own right and because of the Taiwan issue, required a considerable amount of our attention. The role of the foreign policy advisor [FPA] was important because he needed to feed into any military thinking information coming out of the State Department and our diplomatic missions in the area.

Needless to say, the threat, particularly nuclear, that North Korea presented to the region and to the U.S. was another major focus of attention. USFK could not plan for possible conflict with the DPRK without PACOM, and vice versa. We had to stay on top of North Korean issues, both the military and diplomatic components. It was the FPA's job to make certain the CINC knew how the diplomatic play was evolving.

Another big one was India/Pakistan. Our command included India; the Central Command had Pakistan. Both countries had engaged in nuclear testing and were on our blacklist. Yet, we made the point at the Pacific Command that we still had to deal with the Indians, the largest democracy in the world. There were lots of good reasons to deal with the Pakistanis, too. These countries took an increasing amount of our attention.

As for Vietnam, there was a time when people were saying, "We have now normalized a relationship with Vietnam on the political side, we have to start working with them on the military side." It was important to begin the latter, even if it was just for a short visit, or to have Vietnamese come to a training program that we were doing.

Giant Indonesia was in full ferment. You had the end of Suharto's long rule, and the aftermath was uncertain. It was very unstable. You had riots in Jakarta. What was going to happen with Indonesia, including the insurgency on Sumatra and elsewhere, the strife on East Timor, and unsettled conditions on West Papua, required constant attention.

In Southeast Asia, our interests were growing. Japan and Korea had received much attention in the past. But it was clear that there was so much else happening farther south in Asia, in the Middle East. The military wanted assurance of innocent passage and transit and more access to ports and airports in Southeast Asian countries. A whole relationship was evolving with Singapore, with Malaysia. That was on the front burner. Australia was really important, of course. It was a key ally at a time when New Zealand was no longer accessible because it wouldn't accept nuclear-powered ships. Then, you also had a problem in the South China Sea, the Spratly Islands.



Q: Those damn Spratly Islands.

TWINING: They're just made of bits of coral sticking up, or sand bars sticking up out of the water. There was always the rumor there was oil down there. Nobody had ever proven that rumor. You never wanted the six claiming countries to do anything but resolve this issue peacefully, while we maintained freedom of navigation for our ships. So, you had to give the Spratly Islands some attention.

Q: Were you beginning to feel the generational change in South Korea? I served in South Korea twice, once in the military and once as a senior officer. We were living off the 1950s. That generation is essentially gone. Were you feeling that?

TWINING: You did feel it. On visits, you tried to have a variety of contacts in Japan and Korea. You tried to have Japanese and Korean visits in Honolulu. It was clear the generational difference was growing. Pressures were growing. Korea had gone from a little tiny, sleepy place when the Korean War broke out, to a place that had developed enormously, by the time I came onto the scene in 1998. Pressures were on us to get out of the center of downtown Seoul.

Q: Seoul was just terrible. There was a nice golf course, right in the middle of the city.

TWINING: That's right. We were feeling pressures from Japan, especially Okinawa, and those due to urbanization in Korea and Japan. If you drive from Seoul all the way up to the demilitarized zone, you drive through populated areas, almost all the way up there. There used to be farmland, but that farmland is pretty much gone. Korea formerly had a weak Korean military establishment; now it is one of 750,000 well trained soldiers. Yet, you would go up to the DMZ, and who was right on the DMZ? It was American troops. You yourself had to wonder why this is, when the South Koreans are perfectly capable of being on the DMZ themselves. Yes, generational and population pressures were affecting South Korea. Attitudes were also evolving in Japan. We needed to adapt to them and adjust with them.

Q: I don't want to sound dismissive, but by this time, had we almost written off the Philippines? It used to be the center of everything. We had Clark and Subic and the Philippine Senate kicking us out.

TWINING: It's true. Even in my list of countries we paid attention to, I didn't mention the Philippines.



Q: It kind of shows that we were vaguely interested in elections there. They seem to have a terrorist face.

TWINING: When we left Clark, we also left Subic in the early 1990s. Even by 1998, there was still bitterness among Americans that we had been "kicked out." So, the Philippines was on the back burner a bit. Nevertheless, there were so many ties we had with the Philippines. Filipinos were still entering the U.S. military for instance. What really refocused our attention more than anything, I think, was the terrorism. Added to the communist New Peoples Army was the Abu Sayyaf Terrorist movement way down in Mindanao and nearby Basilan Island, with ties to Al-Qaeda. It was part of the larger Southeast Asian terrorist movement, called Jemaah Islamia. All of this really drew our attention back to the Philippines, in a way that had not been the case since we had our bases there. All that happened during the time I was at CINCPAC and meant considerable diplomatic and military attention.

Q: How did we treat Taiwan when you were there?

TWINING: Our handling evolved while I was there. When I first arrived, Taiwanese military officers would visit, but they visited unofficially. They weren't allowed to come to the Pacific Command. They weren't allowed in U.S. government buildings. We would meet them in a nondescript building someplace, but not at the headquarters of the Pacific Command. At the beginning of the Bush II administration, we invited Taiwanese into the Pacific Command. We would have talks with them there. Then, we started sending some officers to Taiwan, in civilian clothes, to observe exercises. Things were evolving somewhat. CINCPAC was also involved in deciding on the military items we would offer to sell the Taiwanese.

Q: Were we concerned about the ability of the Taiwanese to make enough of a credible show that it would not be attacked?

TWINING: To be honest, we were concerned with Taiwanese attitudes toward us and toward their own military. Toward us, they seemed convinced we would bale them out if they ever had a problem with the PRC. We tried to tell them that nothing was automatic, not to assume anything. With regard to their own military, we would say, "How can you have an army that works from 9:00 to 5:00, five days a week? You're asking to buy big naval ships. You don't have enough trained naval personnel even to operate them. Are you really committed to your own defense?" We would go back and forth in our discussions with the Taiwanese. We weren't convinced that the Taiwanese were really prepared to defend themselves. Their planning called for their army to stop a Chinese invasion. Yet, the Chinese can come by boat and they can shoot their missiles. The Taiwanese needed to have a multi-faceted plan ready to deal with all that. I think there was some frustration, certainly on our part.



We followed closely the political and military reporting from our unofficial mission in Taipei, as well as Washington analyses, and understood the real division of sentiment among the Taiwanese population toward China. Yet there also seemed to be serious disconnects which were very troubling.

Q: How about North Korea while you were there?

TWINING: You know, President Clinton and former Secretary of Defense William Perry, had a tremendous impact on people who thought about North Korea. Perry had been Defense Secretary when things got bad after Kim Il Sung's death, especially in 1994, when we thought we might actually have to go to war with North Korea. He was the one who had to make that decision for the Defense Department about whether we should go to war. Yet, here was the same man who was convinced that that wasn't the solution for North Korea. As you know, later in the Clinton administration, there was the Perry process that he headed, involving talks with the North Koreans and with key allies South Korea and Japan. In return for DPRK agreement to put the nuclear genie back in the bottle, we would agree to normalization of relations and the construction of light water reactors.

We had meetings of the three, U.S., South Korea, and Japan, sometimes in Honolulu, during my time there. Perry was on the right track, I'm convinced of it. Of course, it led to Madeleine Albright's own visit to Pyongyang, before the Clinton administration went out of business. It ran out of time to carry out the Perry process.

The U.S. military is very concerned about North Korea. They know we had almost gone to war in 1994. They knew we could almost go to war again. They had to prepare for it. Of course, the U.S. command in South Korea, and the joint command run with South Korea, and the UN command had responsibility for dealing with any North Korean threats. Again, our responsibility in Honolulu, the Pacific Command's responsibility, was to backstop and support anything that our General in Seoul was engaged in. We had to look at where our airplanes were, our ships were, our munitions stores. This was all very important.

My role was to provide the input from the diplomatic side. For example, what was happening with our meetings, in our talks? What was Washington thinking about next steps on the diplomatic side? I had to plug into Washington periodically, and keep the Command briefed on what we were doing, and making sure that as it made its own plans, we weren't at odds at any point.

Q: Was there concern planning or incidents, what have you, with the Indians, India maybe and the Bay of Bengal? The Indians are a really major military power in that region. The Navy apparently is reaching out more. How was this scene during your time at CINCPAC?



TWINING: I guess we saw no reasons to be rivals with the Indian Navy. After the atomic testing, we were barred from even doing anything with the Indians. Admiral Prueher had gone to India, maybe 1997, before I came on board. He was almost cold-shouldered by the Indians. Strobe Talbot, who was deputy secretary of state, commenced regular talks with Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh. That started moving our relationship a bit closer together. At the same time, General Zinni, head of the Central Command, was dealing with the Pakistanis, and frankly, helping move our whole relationship closer with Pakistan.

With our increased concern over Afghanistan and over terrorism, it just made sense that we had to do more with India, and we had to do more with Pakistan. So, I sat in on two meetings with Deputy Secretary Strobe Talbot and Admiral Blair, where Blair laid out his suggestions as to what the military could do not to rock the boat, but to find some peaceful engagement with Indian counterparts and broaden our dialogue. Strobe Talbot agreed.

Eventually, we were able to open things up with the Indians. We made visits to New Delhi and to some other Indian cities. The Indians visited Honolulu. We went on board some Indian ships in Bombay, but we didn't do any actual exercises, for example, during my time. That now is being done. That is healthy. It was a slow process of opening up. We opened up the Asia/Pacific Center that the Defense Department runs in Honolulu to Indian and Pakistani participants, for example. These were all small steps. The Indians continued to receive an American in their military academy. We just tried to move forward in small incremental steps.

Q: Would you like to speculate why relations were incrementally improving?

TWINING: While both of us were strong democracies, we had evolved differently since World War II. Following Indian independence, Prime Minister Nehru studiously tried to steer a course of non-alignment for his country while we were fully occupied in the Cold War where, for many people, being non-aligned was tantamount to being pro-communist. As we proceeded toward the end of the twentieth century, all of this was fading into the past. India was becoming more integrated into the world economy, and the country's leaders realized that they had more than neighboring Pakistan to focus on internationally. The U.S. had been siding with Pakistan for various reasons, and there was a realization in Washington that that was no longer enough. Both countries detonating nuclear devices froze everything briefly, but isolating them produced no result at a time when things were evolving in the region, particularly with the Taliban in control of Afghanistan and harboring international terrorists. We had to move things forward with India and continue the movement with Pakistan. My time at PACOM 1998-2001 was, fortunately, the period in which the improvement of relations could occur, in the interests of both countries.



Q: How about with Vietnam? We opened relations there. In many ways, we had the military there, before we had relations, for the missing in action. What were we doing during the time you were there with Vietnam?

TWINING: Vietnam was slow going. You had to wonder whether the Vietnamese themselves had completely decided how to deal with the U.S. military. For them, I think it was a lot easier dealing with the State Department, but the military, my gosh, these were their enemies. I was at the Vietnamese Embassy two nights ago and saw my old Vietnamese friend I had known when I was based in Dalat, Professor Pho Ba Long. He now lives in the suburbs of Virginia. We were talking about General Vo Nguyen Giap.

Q: Who is still alive.

TWINING: Still alive. He had seen General Giap not long ago. He said that once when he saw General Giap, maybe in 1989, all Giap wanted to talk about was what was happening in the U.S. He asked especially how our educational system worked. He sat my friend down for hours to ask about how the Americans work things. That was healthy. By that time, though, General Giap had been sidelined by the Hanoi leadership. We weren't always sure the Vietnamese military and their political masters knew exactly how to deal with the U.S. military when our diplomatic relations normalized in the mid-1990s.

I traveled with Admiral Prueher to Hanoi in 1998. We had a nice visit there. He had received a ranking Vietnamese general in Honolulu, just before. We reciprocated visits. Admiral Prueher talked about how we could move things forward between our two militaries, but it was tough going. He said, for example, we could have ship visits. We could send in a ship, for example to the port of Haiphong, or the Vietnamese could send a ship over to an American port like Pearl Harbor. Vietnamese could participate in some of our military schools. The Vietnamese replied, "Well, we'll do it step by step." It was clear they hadn't made up their minds how far to go.

Q: What about the relationship with the Chinese military? Was this a cautious relationship, wondering when they would go, because obviously the Chinese are really the only potential real rival? Well, the Libyans, but they are sort of enclosed. How was it? Was it two dogs looking at each other?



TWINING: The Chinese were, of course, and still are, suspicious because of our ties with Taiwan. It is not a secret. At the same time, China has been changing so quickly, with the Internet and travel, and investment, calling into question how well authorities can control people or places. It was an interesting period as it still is. With the military, we had a feeling they were divided between the older officers, who were very conservative and the young whippersnappers, who were on the Internet, the young captains or majors who wanted to see the world. They wanted to get out. They wanted to do things. They wanted to be modern. They wanted to know about modern weaponry, for example. They were open, but how much latitude did they have? They didn't seem to have a great deal, except when you were with one of them individually, who would whisper in your ear, "I really want to go to the U.S.," or something like that. That was the context within we worked. Things were going fairly well, with both our militaries opening up cautiously and incrementally.

What was hanging over our working with the Chinese and the military, in particular, was the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989. People on Capitol Hill and elsewhere were saying, "Should our military really be in bed with their military when they have people who do these terrible things?" We would argue that it was in our common interest to do things together. If we were going through the Taiwan Strait, for example, this is an international waterway, but there was no reason not to tell the Chinese that we are going through the Taiwan strait. There is no reason that in a port somewhere, they can't see our shipping, what our ships look like, and vice versa. We really thought there was room to work together.

The Clinton administration, in its last several years, was pretty forthcoming in wanting to reach out to the Chinese, and work with the Chinese. I had an experience in the year 2000, when the Secretary of Defense Cohen went to Beijing. I went with Admiral Blair. We sat in on a meeting with Vice President Hu Jintao, now the president of China. I remember when Hu was coming to Washington, a couple of years ago, to see President Bush, I was astonished by my colleagues at the State Department saying, "We don't know anything about Hu. We have never met him." Everybody was saying, "Who is Hu?" I spoke up and said, "Well, I met him. I was present for a good meeting with him, and I was impressed with the man." He didn't need briefing notes. He knew what he was talking about. He was self- confident. We had some opportunities in those days, and presented opportunities in return.

As you know, of course, once the Bush administration came in, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, in particular, took a much more cautious attitude about military to military contact with the Chinese. As you remember, we had two bad incidents in 2001, one with the Chinese, and one with the Japanese. The one with the Chinese involved a spy plane, if you will...

Q: A reconnaissance.

TWINING: A reconnaissance plane.



Q: A spy plane means you are over. I always felt it was a misnomer. We were a legitimate plane that was over international airways.

TWINING: That's right. It was an EP-3 aircraft. In fact, I have a little piece of it sitting at home. Chinese MiGs forced our EP-3 down, flying over international waters, onto Hainan Island. That generated a major crisis. Our military attaché in Beijing was able to get access to the crew, which was detained for 10 days before we could obtain its release. We knew the Chinese would have gone all over the plane, of course, but we still wanted the plane back. We rented an Antonov, a massive airplane. I have never seen such a big airplane. We put the EP-3 inside, and brought it back to the U.S. Admiral Blair, CINCPACFLT Admiral Tom Fargo, and I went out to look at it at Hickam AFB when the Antonov transited en route to the EP-3's manufacturer in Georgia. The incident put a real damper on things, occurring just after the Bush administration came on board.

Q: What happened at CINCPAC? Was everyone alerted?

TWINING: Everybody was alerted, and yet we wanted people to keep calm in dealing with it. Indeed, let the diplomatic process work. That was the word I spread all over CINCPAC. I was the link between the State Department and the Command. Let us work diplomatically to get the Chinese to release the crew and the plane, and it happened.

Q: Could you describe the role the CINC played during the EP-3 crisis?

TWINING: The unified commander was the key person in the region to deal with this crisis. The incident happened on his watch, involving a crew and a plane for which he had ultimate responsibility, and in whose mission he had concurred. The incident was of international import, requiring considerable, personal involvement of the Secretaries of State and Defense on our side and their counterparts on the Chinese side, as well as the top military officials of both sides.



Subject of course to Washington and to the primacy which all placed on diplomacy, Admiral Blair basically served as action officer. The CINC made multiple calls to, or took calls from, the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and his predecessor, now Ambassador to China, Joseph Prueher, for example, helping to shape our overall stance and providing input from the political/military point of view. He tried to influence the tone and content of what was released to the press, seeking to keep things as calm as possible as well as to prevent sensitive information from leaking. Admiral Blair was a key actor with respect to arrangements that were made, including the pick-up of the crew and, later, the plane. Our Embassy in Beijing did yeoman service in handling things within China, both in its multiple high level diplomatic and military contacts in Beijing as well as down on Hainan Island, and our people in Japan played important supporting roles. As a former naval pilot who understood EP-3s, Ambassador Prueher was absolutely the right man at the right time to deal with the issue within China.

The EP-3 incident provided Admiral Blair with food for thought. While he had worked to improve his personal relationships with senior Chinese military officials, he realized that he was still unable to pick up a phone when there was such a crisis and deal with a counterpart directly to try to defuse it. Undoubtedly the problem was more on the Chinese side and the awkward distribution of responsibility within the state and party structures, but he was convinced that more needed to be done to permit quick and more productive contact and dialogue in the future. Secretary Rumsfeld's freezing our military relations with the Chinese following the incident did not help accomplish this goal.

Q: The Bush administration has changed an awful lot in the way they look at the world. The feeling was, "Let's do it alone. We can do whatever we want." There was less emphasis on diplomacy. Did you feel that when they arrived?

TWINING: When it first arrived, we felt the Bush administration was taking a new look at everything. One of the first ways we saw it was Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld canceling a small training exercise we were going to do with the little island state of Vanuatu. At the time we thought, "Why is he worrying about Vanuatu?" Then, we realized he was looking at everything. Vanuatu was perhaps the first one that came up on our scope. I think at the time, he was also wondering about what we should do with China. Then, the EP-3 incident occurred. It just made him and the administration pull back completely with respect to the military doing anything with China. Fortunately, that position softened over time.

Q: There was about a week of demonstrations against our embassy. The Chinese lost a pilot in this thing, very obviously because of his own damn error. But, they didn't play it that way.



TWINING: Remember that there had been bad demonstrations in China two earlier when we bombed their embassy in Belgrade. In Beijing, Shanghai, up in the northeast in Shenyang, over in Chengdu, we had some very bad demonstrations. They were so bad that I think the Chinese realized that any future demonstrations had to be much better controlled, wondering what they had unleashed. So, while there were demonstrations in Beijing, as you say, when the EP-3 was forced down and the Chinese pilot died, they were under much better control. Thank heaven.

Again, the incident made the Bush administration pull back completely on mil-to-mil relations with China. When you pull back, you wonder whether you have any basis for dialogue. I think, eventually they realized they needed a basis for dialogue, which you do it by working together. Things had become pretty normal in 2002.

Q: You were talking about the Japanese sub accident.

TWINING: Right. That was also truly a crisis, and this with an ally. Again, it happened just off of Honolulu, 13 miles out, or something like that.

Q: Explain what it is.

TWINING: This was an incident in which an American submarine had taken a bunch of supporters of defense, if you will, civilians, down on a dive, and then came back up again. The captain of the sub, who was reportedly one of the best submariners in Hawaii, was consumed with showing these visitors the capabilities of the submarine. He didn't look carefully enough, or have his crew look carefully enough, before surfacing. He surfaced under a Japanese fishing school boat, the Ehime Maru, which immediately sank.

Q: A trainer.

TWINING: Right, a training boat, full of kids 18 years old. A lot of deaths occurred. It was a terrible time. The families came over to sit and wait for rescues or bodies. They waited in Hawaii for weeks. I had to go downtown with a military colleague and talk to them, telling them we were trying to do all we could. The Command and the Navy had to make judgment calls about when to stop looking for survivors. The military tell you that after two or three days, there is no longer a possibility of survivors. The prime minister of Japan wanted us to hold off a little more, before stopping the search for survivors. The Navy began to try to recover remains. It was a difficult time. The Japanese foreign ministry sent a delegation to Hawaii to work full time with CINCPAC and with the Navy command in Hawaii.



It occupied all of us. It was such a tragic situation that didn't need to happen. Emotions were running very high in Japan. We had the prefect of the little place where the boat was based come to Hawaii. Finally, the Navy bit the bullet and sent the Vice Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Fallon, to Japan. The captain of the submarine, to his credit, wanted to go to Japan and apologize. This would have been more important than anything. Navy lawyers advised against it. To this day, a lot of us think that was a mistake. He had wanted to do it right away, and the Navy wouldn't let him. Finally, when the Vice Chief of Naval Operations went over to Japan to present formal apologies, weeks had already passed. It was very sad.

After it was all over, I received, and I believe Admiral Blair did too, a beautiful vase from Prime Minister Mori to thank us for our roles in trying to put this thing to rest. It was something that preoccupied all of us for weeks. It involved the president and the prime minister, and the national security advisor, and the Secretary of Defense. Everyone was pulled into it. The worst part of it all was sitting down with the families and saying, "We have no news for you."

Q: Can you go into greater detail as to how this incident impacted on the Command?

TWINING: What was important at first was to establish the facts so that everyone involved in any aspect of the handling could act and speak knowledgeably. Realizing that there could well be legal actions taken, not least of which against the commander of the submarine, any comments had to be made in a way so as to avoid impacting on such eventualities.

I should make it clear that, while PACOM was involved in much of the public side of things, this was first and foremost a Navy matter. The principal player for the U.S. was Admiral Thomas Fargo, Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Fleet [CINCPACFLT] at Pearl Harbor, supported by the Rear Admiral in charge of the submarine fleet there, Albert Konetzni. Admiral Blair and PACOM did everything possible to support them, and we met frequently for this purpose. Fargo and Konetzni in particular were the ones who had to deal with their Navy superiors in Washington. Admiral Blair would talk with Pentagon senior officials and our Tokyo Ambassador, and I would be on the line daily with State and our Embassy people.

Communication was good, and it was intense. Admiral Blair stayed in constant contact with Admiral Fargo, and others of us with him and his staff. While all of us expressed our apologies for an incident that should never have occurred, I take my hat off to Admiral Fargo who, the same night after the incident, despite terrific pressures on him, took time to drive over to the Japanese Consulate General in Honolulu to apologize personally to the Japanese. That quick and heartfelt action on his part was never forgotten. Admiral Konetzni acted similarly.



Throughout the weeks following this incident, there was considerable interaction with the Japanese. Numerous visitors arrived from Japan, and both CINCPAC and CINCPACFLT received them and shared all available information with them. The family members required frequent reassuring. Contacts with the Japanese Consulate General itself hounded incessantly by Japanese media which arrived en masse in Honolulu were non-stop. As I mentioned, a special team of Japanese Foreign Ministry personnel came to Hawaii and camped at the Consulate General, needing attention from all of us on both sides. Japanese military personnel became involved. While we needed no extra help from State, this crisis tested my small office to its limits, as State, by extension, the interagency network required a constant feed of information, while we were also supporting the CINC's diplomacy and reaching out on our own, as well. The J-5 shop was a good partner in this, as well as having to satisfy DOD/ISA at the same time.

Q: Is there anything else we should cover?

TWINING: The other big thing that happened during my time at PACOM was the uprising in East Timor. As you remember, in September 1999 the Indonesians basically pulled out of East Timor. But before they did, they allowed militias, almost surely funded by elements in the Indonesian military, its Special Operations people, to run wild. Capital Dili was burned down. There were burnings and killings all over East Timor. We at the Pacific Command became very involved in trying to figure out with Washington what we could contribute to help East Timor get back on its feet. As you recall, the Australians first led a multinational force into East Timor to try to restore some stability, some security to the place, once the Indonesians had gone and left it in ruin.

What were we to do? Were we going to send in a peacekeeping element? Were we going to wait until the UN took over in early 2000, and be part of the peacekeeping operation there? In the final analysis, we did neither, but we did something very similar. We sent an element down from Okinawa to support, first the multinational force, and then the UN peacekeeping operation in various areas, where they needed particular capabilities. We didn't integrate them in formally, but they worked side by side. The collaboration satisfied everyone. There was no question of chain of command, or anything else. The informal arrangements worked well. We had some military people on the ground, carrying out useful functions.

Dili was an incredible scene. I went out to East Timor twice with Admiral Blair. The first time we went out was in late 1999. Again, the capital city was destroyed, and there weren't many people. I remember there was nothing for sale in the marketplace, there were no goods. People were eking out an existence, and that was all. I went back a year or so later, and you already saw that the city was rebounding. In a visit to a town in the countryside, you saw there were some goods available. The second time around, there was an East Timor government in place, as well.



Also in Dili in 1990 was Sergio Vieira de Mello, a wonderful man, who had been in Cambodia in 1992-93, who died subsequently in Iraq. De Mello was in charge of the peacekeeping operation in East Timor as UN special representative. He really helped get East Timor on its feet. The military provided security, stability, but the overall peacekeeping operation was responsible for getting an indigenous government in place, where there had been none before, the Indonesians having provided the government structure. When they left, the government structure left with them. East Timor took a lot of our attention including negotiating with Washington, with Australia, and with the UN, and support.

Q: You left there when?

TWINING: I left Honolulu in September 2001. I went to the U.S. Mission to the UN in New York as the Senior Advisor for East Asia and the Pacific for the UN General Assembly. Every year, someone goes from each geographic bureau at State to reinforce the U.S. mission and serve as the direct liaison with the Asians, or the Africans, or the South Americans. I went in the fall of 2001, returned in the fall of 2002, and went back again just after we went into Iraq in April 2003. When I went in in April 2003 for three months, that was more to liaise with the East and South Asians, to serve as a channel of communication. Now that we were in Iraq, how should we then manage to go forward? What international cooperation could we count on? I would solicit the advice and concerns of our Asian friends and pass it to Washington. So, I did three stints in New York. I was in New York on September 11, 2001 incidentally.

After three and a half months in New York, I went back to Washington. In 2002, I worked for the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific, James Kelly, directly. The job involved liaising with Capitol Hill on Asian issues, working also on the proposed Khmer Rouge tribunal in Cambodia.

Regarding the latter, the U.S. had long been the strongest proponent outside Cambodia for organizing such a tribunal. Indeed, when I went before Senator Chuck Robb, Chairman of the Asian Subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for my formal hearing as Ambassador to Cambodia in 1994, I conveyed to him on behalf of East Asia Assistant Secretary Winston Lord the administration's agreement to support a Yale University-organized Cambodian Documentation Center to gather data which could be used in evidence at such a Tribunal. In the last years of the Clinton administration, David Scheffer, head of State's War Crimes Office, played an important role in helping push forward agreement to establish the Tribunal. Senator John Kerry later helped rescue the agreement, as well, bogged down due to Cambodian Government reluctance or hesitation.



By 2002, it was a question of when, not whether, the Tribunal would be established. Unfortunately, there were some on Capitol Hill who feared that any such Tribunal which had the participation of Cambodian judges (along with international judges) would constitute less than impartial justice. With the Bush administration on board in support of the Tribunal, as the Clinton administration had been, I tried to add my voice to persuade the Hill doubters that this mixed Tribunal could nevertheless work. The Tribunal is now expected to get off the ground in early 2006. I am convinced it will help clear the air and allow Cambodians victimized by the Khmer rouge to sleep more soundly in the future. My real disappointment is that, while we were the principal outside backer at the beginning, we will not be providing any funding for the Tribunal. Those on the Hill still not convinced of its impartiality have barred American funding. Fortunately, the Cambodian Documentation Center continues, with USG support, and has now gathered considerable information under the direction of Cambodian-American director Youk Chhang to provide to the hearings.

I retired at the end of September 2002 when I was once again in New York City, at the U.S. mission. I raised my hand and signed on the next day as a retiree, to continue working in New York as the East Asia advisor for the General Assembly.

Q: Starting from September 11, you had a good look at the UN, and a couple more years. Did you find a change in attitude toward the United States?

TWINING: There is no question, if you were in New York City on September 11, whether you were from Burkina Faso or Bahrain or Indonesia or the United States, you had to be affected by it. We all were. We smelled the acrid fumes. We looked out our windows and smoke came from the World Trade Center for a month afterward. We were all affected by it. The international delegates wanted to do anything possible to support us. It made it possible to start getting consultations on terrorism going in New York at the UN. It made it possible to establish a committee to examine the transfer of financial assets to terrorist organizations. Yes, there was a lot of sympathy toward the United States, and wanting to work together, at the outset.

Q: Did you find that as you moved into the Iraq business, that the sympathy dissipated, or not, from your perspective?

TWINING: In all candor, yes. The sympathy dissipated. It looked like we were the Lone Ranger. We were going off by ourselves. You could say, "But we have 52 members of the Iraq coalition of the willing." People would reply, "Well, what does that really mean? How many troops are on the ground, from how many countries?" When I returned to New York in April 2003, along with colleagues from the African and Latin American bureaus, representatives were bewildered why were we doing this? Why did we feel we had to go in?



My approach was, "I'm not here to argue the merits of the U.S. military action. I'm here to consult with you, to get a list of your ideas as to how we might now work together to make for a better Iraq." You had some doubters. The Malaysians were doubters. They said, "What do you mean you want our ideas? You're not going to listen to them anyway." There were others who were very forthcoming. The Bangladeshi representative, for example, told me, "Look, we are one of the major democracies of the world. We are a Muslim state. Call on us, to help you, as intermediaries with Iraqis. Let us help teach them about democracy, what democracy is like in a Muslim country."

My colleagues and I sent ideas that came from various representatives to the UN, those willing to come up with ideas, back to Washington. I can't say that much was done with these ideas in Washington. Yet, it was worthwhile, even sending the three of us to New York, because it made others understand that we were at least willing to talk to them, and listen to their views. I assured them that we were listening and that we would send their views back to Washington.

Indeed, before I went to New York in April 2003, Secretary of State Powell had decided in February 2003 to have someone attend the Non-Aligned Summit in Kuala Lumpur, to observe the summit, to interact with the delegates at the summit. I was in retirement, but I was called out to go to Malaysia, during a terrific snowstorm back here, as the U.S. representative. The Non-Aligned Movement can get fairly radical. You had Castro there. You had all kinds of people who would rant and rave. At the same time, you had a lot of friends who are moderates in attendance. Cameroon and Cambodia were there, for instance. Since this was before the Iraq invasion, I was constantly asked, "Are you going to invade? Why are you doing this?" I would say, in Kuala Lumpur, "I have been sent here not to talk about invading Iraq, I have been sent here to find out what your concerns are, and to make sure Washington is aware of your concerns." It was a line to which I tried to adhere carefully. A number of people in Kuala Lumpur were from the missions in New York. It was easy for me then in April to continue the dialogue with them in New York City.

I couldn't argue the war. I personally didn't believe in this conflict. I didn't think it was necessary, at this time. I didn't like the way we were doing it. Yet, I could see the importance of dialoguing with friend and foe on Iraq.

Q: Charlie, I think this is a good place to stop. Great.

TWINING: Thank you.

ADDENDUM

Q: What have you been doing since our interviews concluded in mid-2004?



TWINING: I was asked to return to the Department of State in Washington for four months in 2004 to work in the Bureau of African Affairs on Burundi. That country had been going through a very delicate process of uniting the many rival Tutsi and Hutu groups to bring a halt to the civil war and restore peace, to culminate in the merging of armed forces and police and in an election process leading to a new government. Someone was needed full time in Washington to backstop what our able envoy in Bujumbura, Ambassador James Yellin, was working assiduously to support. At the same time, there was finally consensus to organize a UN peacekeeping operation in Burundi, and my past experience was useful, I hope, in allowing me to contribute to formulating the U.S. position in support. It was a period of hope for that strife ridden country, and events since then have proven the hope was not in vain.

The African Bureau asked me in 2005 to serve as Chargé d'Affaires in Lome, Togo, during most of the April-September period. With the civil conflicts that have been raging in recent years in nearby Ivory Coast, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, no one wanted to see little Togo torn apart by ethnic or regional conflict, as well. This was a real possibility since the dictator in place for 38 years, a proud northerner, General Eyadema, had died in February, and succession was disputed. Our Ambassador in Lome left for an assignment in Iraq at the end of March, which was the reason I was asked to fill in temporarily. Very uneven Presidential elections were held on April 24, and when Eyadema's son was announced two days later as the winner, Lome and other cities erupted in violence and bloodshed. While both pro-government and opposition elements were involved, it was primarily the former which was responsible for at least 400 deaths. We worked closely with France, Germany, the EU, and the UN in support of non-violence and reconciliation. While calm was restored, little Togo's future path is not yet assured.

Finally, I led an international delegation to Liberia on behalf of the International Republican Institute to observe the November 8 Presidential run-off election. Liberia has been unsettled since Sergeant Samuel Doe overthrew and killed the elected leader, President Tolbert, in 1980, and was in turn deposed a decade later during a vicious civil war that began in late 1989 and only ended with a peace agreement in Accra in 2003, the exile of ruthless President Charles Taylor, and the introduction of a peacekeeping force similar to that I had known in Cambodia. The run-off election was as professional and peaceful as any I have observed. Every Liberian queried leading the polls referred to hopes of a new era of peace, stability, and prosperity. With the election of an experienced international civil servant, Madam Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, as the country's President, one departed Monrovia with optimism that Liberia may now be on the path to recovery.

December 2005

End of interview